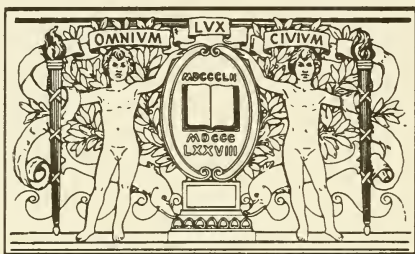


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BY AMY BROOKS



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They clasped hands, and in a graceful line they skipped to the lilting measure.— *Page 48.*

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BY

AMY BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DAINTY," "DOROTHY'S PLAYMATES"

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"RANDY'S LUCK," "A JOLLY CAT TALE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR



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DOROTHY DAINTY AT THE SHORE

CHAPTER I

NANCY'S RETURN

ON the broad, cushioned window-seat sat a beautiful little girl, eagerly looking out across the lawn to the avenue. She was watching the carriages which rolled past the gateway, and wondering how long it would be before a handsome one drawn by a span of proudly stepping horses would drive up to the door.

That would mean that mamma and Aunt Charlotte had arrived and that

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they had brought Nancy with them — Nancy, whom she had been longing to see.

“Oh, I *do* wonder how long it will be before they get here,” she whispered, her hands tightly clasped, her blue eyes shining with anticipation. A maid entered the room and commenced dusting the furniture.

“Sure, Miss Dorothy, ye’ll be so excited with yer constant watchin’ that ye’ll be ’bout wild when yer ma comes bringin’ Miss Nancy.”

“Indeed I shall,” Dorothy replied, “and who wouldn’t be? Just think of it, Norah! Nancy had no home when mamma befriended her and placed her in Aunt Charlotte Grayson’s care. Nancy was so sweet and thankful that we all loved her dearly.”

“An’ then some scamp stole her an’ made her be dancin’ on the stage, I’m told,” said Norah, her honest face showing her sympathy.

“And now she’s been found; and this very day I’m to see her again. Oh, are they coming now?” She turned again toward the window and looked eagerly out.

“Yes, yes! It is mamma, and Aunt Charlotte is just coming up the steps with Nancy,” cried Dorothy as she hastened from the room and ran lightly down the stairway.

“The wind is raw, Miss Dorothy,” said the butler; “ye’d best stay inside and so not hinder them comin’ in.”

Mrs. Dainty paused in the hall lovingly to greet Dorothy, while Aunt Charlotte took Nancy to the library, where she

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placed her in a cushioned chair before the blazing fire. Dorothy ran to her and hovered about her, tenderly kissing her and telling her how glad she was to have her with her once more.

Nancy was too tired with her journey to be very talkative, but her happy face showed how delighted she was to be with those who loved her, and from whom she had so long been absent. She looked about the room and noted the pictures which she had always liked best.

“It is so good to be here again,” she said. Dorothy left the room just long enough to find the pretty gifts which she had kept for her, and while Nancy was admiring them, Norah entered the room, as Mrs. Dainty nodded permission, bringing a bouquet of early flowers which the gardener had sent.

Nancy was happy indeed that from Dorothy, the beautiful little daughter of the house, to the servants she had been held in loving regard. And now she was to spend long, happy days with Dorothy in the beautiful garden of the great stone house; just such sunny days as she had enjoyed before she had been stolen from Aunt Charlotte and carried away to the great city. It seemed like a delightful dream.

“So many times while I was far from you, Aunt Charlotte,” she said, “I used to dream that I was here again, and I would see you and Mrs. Dainty and Dorothy, and then while I was talking with you, I’d wake and find that I was still in the great city and that you and Dorothy were far, far away.”

“Well, it isn’t a dream this time,” said

Dorothy, "it's just real and true, and all the girls you used to know are as glad as I am that you are to be here to play with us again. Molly and Flossie are coming over to-morrow to see you. They told me they could hardly wait."

She perched upon the arm of the chair in which Nancy sat, and the dancing flames in the grate touched her bright hair and warmed the soft color in Nancy's cheeks.

It was arranged that Nancy and Aunt Charlotte should spend the first days with Mrs. Dainty and Dorothy, and then return to the cottage. The gardens joined, and thus Dorothy and Nancy were near neighbors. It was a little puzzling to Dorothy that Nancy should be quietly happy when she herself was so excited.

"But you must remember, dear, that Nancy has been ill," said Mrs. Dainty; "she will soon be ready for play, and quite like herself."

"She doesn't *look* sick," Dorothy replied; "her cheeks are bright, and her eyes shine."

Mrs. Dainty smiled at Dorothy's eagerness: and said, "You must play gentle games with her at first, and in little ways try to amuse her. It will not be long before she can play as long and as gayly as she chooses."

It was wonderful to see how rapidly Nancy improved, and how bright and talkative she became. Molly Merton came often to see her, always bringing a little gift—a book, some flowers, or a merry game in which they all could take part. Flossie Barnet usually came with her, and

Nancy was surprised to find that the little girl could now speak without a lisp. Flossie was the youngest of all the playmates, but her sweet disposition and winning ways made her a welcome member of the group of little neighbors. Inez and Jeanette Earl often spent an afternoon with her, and Katy Dean was a frequent visitor.

Nancy wondered why Patricia Lavine did not come. She did not like Patricia, none of the girls did, but it seemed odd not to see her.

"She's moved away," said Molly Merton, "and all of us are glad."

"We mustn't *say* so," said Flossie gently.

"Yes, we must," insisted Molly; "'t isn't anything to say, since we all think the same."

Very eagerly the playmates questioned Nancy about her life in the city, but she seemed unwilling to talk about it and often would say:—

“Oh, I never liked to be there, so far away from Aunt Charlotte and Dorothy, so don't let's talk about it.” Once when Molly urged her to tell them how she learned to dance, she said:—

“It wasn't pleasant at all. I had to dance whether I felt like it or not. Professor Bonfanti gave me the lessons, and he seemed always to be scolding. I don't like to talk about it, but sometime I'll dance for you,” and the girls were delighted.

“We won't tease you again, Nancy,” said Molly, kindly, “you shall dance for us when you feel just like it, but one thing I'll tell you: I'm just sure you can do it

beautifully, just as sure as if I had seen you."

"And I shall like to please you," Nancy answered simply. "Before, I danced for strangers; *this* time it will be for friends."

CHAPTER II

IN THE GARDEN

JUNE had come. The roses blossomed in gorgeous beauty, sending out their fragrance upon every passing breeze. The flowering vines clambered over the walls of the great stone house, wreathing it in beautiful festoons and garlands. The huge garden vases seemed overflowing with a wealth of bloom, the tall trees whispered overhead, the fountain plashed in the sunlight. Oh, there never was a more delightful place for two little friends to roam about in, and Dorothy and Nancy spent the sunny hours in the garden, drinking in the per-

fume, the light, the beauty all about them. There were guests expected; Dorothy's cousins, Aline and Russell Dalton, were coming for a short visit, and Dorothy could hardly wait for them to arrive.

"You'll like Aline; she's the brightest, sweetest girl you ever knew," said Dorothy, "and Russell is full of fun. I've told them about you, Nancy, and they're so glad that you are with us now, and that they are to meet you."

"I'm glad they are coming," Nancy replied; "I'm sure to like them."

"Indeed you will," said Dorothy, "and they will like you; every one does."

It was true that every one liked Nancy; Dorothy was a favorite because of her sweet disposition, her loving ways, her gentle manner. She was sunny and bright from the crown of her curly head to her

dancing feet, and ever since her birth had had the blessing of all that wealth and careful training could give.

Nancy's early days had been spent in poverty, in a home where love, gentleness, and good breeding were unknown.

With all her hungry little heart she had longed for better things, and when she was placed under Aunt Charlotte Grayson for careful training, she had eagerly tried to learn, and had in a very short time become a pleasant little companion and a gentle-mannered child. She loved Dorothy dearly, and Dorothy's friends were her friends. Nancy was bright and interesting, loving, loyal, and true.

Up and down the paths they walked, their arms about each other, talking of the cousins who would soon arrive, and

planning games with which to entertain them.

“Miss Dorothy! Miss Dorothy! Will you come up to the house for a moment? Your mamma says I’m to call you.” Dorothy ran toward the house.

“I’ll be back soon,” she said to Nancy as she hurried to the maid, who stood waiting to tell Mrs. Dainty’s errand.

While waiting for Dorothy to return, Nancy wandered from one mass of blooms to another, up and down the sunny paths and across the lawn to yet another path from which she could plainly see the avenue.

She leaned against a tree trunk and idly watched two butterflies at play in the sunlight. How free, how gay they were! Dancing, flitting, up over a gorgeous flower bed, down under the shadow



His old straw hat, his loose blouse, and the stick which he carried over his shoulder served to give him the air of a jaunty traveler. — *Page 15.*

of a blossoming shrub, then up, up on golden wings into the bright shimmering sunlight, and always at play. Nancy watched them with sparkling eyes.

“I’m as free as they,” she cried, “as free as they, and I am so happy to be here at home again with dear Aunt Charlotte, Mrs. Dainty, who has always been so good to me, and Dorothy, dear Dorothy. Who could help loving to be with Dorothy?”

She turned toward the broad avenue. Some one was coming toward her. Nancy wondered if it would prove to be a stranger or a friend. Now he was coming nearer with a quick, resolute tread. It was a boy, who whistled as he tramped along, and his old straw hat, his loose blouse, and the stick which he carried over his shoulder served to give him the air of a

jaunty traveller. From his stick hung a small bundle, which swung as he walked, as if it were light. He did not see Nancy until he was very near her, but as soon as he saw her he stopped and gave a long, low whistle.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “Where’d ye come from, Nancy? Somebody said ye’d been stole an’ was ’way off in er big city.”

“That was true,” said Nancy, “but I’m here now to stay, and you don’t know how glad I am.”

“Shouldn’t think you’d be,” said the boy, doubtfully; “should think ye’d rather be in the city. This is er nice place ter be in, an’ you was lucky to be took an’ keered fer, when ye’d always lived over next ter me in a ole house no better’n oun. ’Twa’n’t yer own ma ye lived with, only yer step-ma; though mine

ain't no better'n er stepma'd be; that's why I'm goin' off."

He made his declaration sturdily and looked to Nancy for approval, but Nancy, to his surprise, appeared anything but pleased.

"Oh, Jimmy," she cried, "you don't mean that you are going to run away?"

"No, I don't," said Jimmy, "I mean I've *run*. I've tied up this bundle an' I'm goin' ter keep walkin' till I reach the city. I'm er boy, an' I'm goin' ter take keer er myself."

He spoke bravely, defiantly, but there was something in his voice that made Nancy long to urge him to turn back. She felt that Jimmy was hasty.

"Oh, don't you do it, Jimmy," she cried; "you'll be awful homesick."

"Guess *not*!" the boy replied. "I tell

you what, Nancy, I'm sick er bein' switched; every time I do a thing that ain't just right ma switches me, an' I've had enough of it."

"But, Jimmy," pleaded Nancy, "I know you'll be homesick. No matter how unpleasant your home is, you'll wish you were back again when you are really away."

"No, I shan't," Jimmy stoutly declared, "I guess I know what I want ter do. I've started out, an' I'm *goin'* ter go, so 'tain't any use ter talk. I know I'll like it when I git there. Good-by, Nancy."

He trudged sturdily off down the avenue, and Nancy watched until he was out of sight. She wished that she could have coaxed him to turn back and try the home life once more. She knew how hard a life he led, yet it seemed to her that

homesickness was harder still; but the boy had been determined. Nancy knew that even if he had not hurried away, further pleading would have been useless. For a long time she stood thinking of Jimmy, and she did not hear Dorothy's footsteps as she ran toward her.

"Have I been long away?" she asked. "Mamma wished me to try on a new dress, and the dressmaker was so fussy that I thought she never would be done fitting and planning."

Then Nancy told her of Jimmy, and how impossible it had been to make him change his mind. "I tried to coax him," said Nancy, "but he said he was a boy, and he would not stay to listen."

"Well, perhaps he *can* take care of himself," said Dorothy, who firmly believed that boys were strong and capable of

doing much that girls could not do. "My cousin Russell can manage a canoe, and a toboggan, and he can drive our span as well as John can. I truly believe he could take care of himself if he chose."

"But you wouldn't like to have him run away from home and try it, would you?" asked Nancy, with wondering eyes.

"Indeed I should not," Dorothy replied. "I only mean that I am sure that Russell *could* do it; so perhaps Jimmy can."

But Nancy was not convinced. She had never liked Jimmy, and she knew that his mother had never been kind to him or his sister, but she could not help thinking that to be hurrying away to an unknown city was rather a wild thing for a boy to do.

The arrival of Aline and Russell for

the time chased away all thoughts of Jimmy, and the four children at once became fast friends. The cousins were charmed with Nancy, and Nancy was delighted with their frank friendliness; and when for a moment Nancy left them to do an errand for Aunt Charlotte, Russell, in true boy fashion, bluntly spoke his admiration.

“She’s a trump!” he declared; “any girl or boy who had been praised and cheered for fine dancing as she has would brag about it, but she doesn’t a bit; I like Nancy. She’s a nice girl, and a bright one, too!”

“I knew you would like her, Russell,” said Dorothy, “and the longer you know her the better you’ll like her.”

“She’s so full of fun,” said Aline, “and she keeps saying such amusing things.”

"Nancy is never tiresome," said Dorothy, her bright eyes showing how pleased she was that her cousins should so earnestly admire her friend.

With many games they spent the morning, the garden ringing with their gay laughter, and so swiftly did the hours fly that they could scarcely believe that luncheon time had arrived; yet the maid was calling them, and the great clock was striking when they entered the hall.

It was a lively party which surrounded the table at luncheon. Mrs. Dainty was very entertaining, the children told of the morning's gayety, while Aunt Charlotte watched Nancy's bright face, and was glad to see how well and happy she was. The afternoon sped much as the morning had, and in the evening Mrs.

Dainty sang some songs for her guests, while Russell played his guitar most charmingly.

The day had been warm and sunny, but the evening being much cooler, the butler had made a fire in the grate, and the little party gathered around the fireplace. In the cheery glow they listened to fascinating tales which Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte told, — tales of Greek myths, of nymphs and satyrs, of gods and goddesses; and in the glowing fire the children tried to see shapes of fairy folk in glittering groups.

“I see Neptune with his trident,” said Russell. “That big coal in the centre of the grate with the little coal on top of it is the sea-king, and those little sparks on his head make his crown. Don’t you see him, Dorothy?”

“Yes,” said Dorothy, “that is I guess I do, but I see something plainer. It’s that little bright coal at the side of the grate, and I think it’s a sea-nymph, and the bright bits around her are spray.”

Nancy thought that she could see, at the back of the fireplace, a band of nymphs dancing in the firelight, while Aline insisted that the great coals in front were an escort of dolphins arriving to do honor to Neptune.

The flames danced higher, and the children pointed with delight to new shapes, and the sparks flew up the chimney. It seemed an odd and delightful pastime for a June evening, but the cool wind which had commenced blowing at twilight had made the cheery fire welcome. The evening had been delightful, and no one had enjoyed it more than had

Nancy. How sweet it was to be one of such a merry party, to join in the games, to listen to the music, the charming stories, the lively chatter.

When later, in their chamber, Nancy told Aunt Charlotte of Jimmy's threat that he would run away, and that her pleading had been useless, that he had kept on his way, insisting that he thought it would be fine to live in a large city and take care of himself, Aunt Charlotte had seemed less anxious than Nancy had expected.

"But, Aunt Charlotte," said Nancy, "I can't help wondering if Jimmy is out to-night, with nowhere but outdoors to sleep. I never liked Jimmy, but I don't like to think that he is out on the road somewhere, for even if he *is* a boy, he'd surely be afraid."

"I should not be at all surprised if Jimmy at this very moment were in his bed at home," said Aunt Charlotte, and Nancy wondered why she smiled.

"Well, he *said* he was going," said Nancy, "and he truly was walking away from home just as fast as he could, and whistling as if he was real jolly, though he didn't look so at all."

"Nancy, dear, I've heard boys speak in that way before," Aunt Charlotte replied. "Jimmy was perhaps angry over some fancied wrong, and hastily tied up his bundle and resolved to run away. I think when it began to be dark, that, without doubt, Jimmy felt less angry than he at first thought, and that he turned about and hurried home. Boys are not apt to remain angry long. They begin to be hungry, and after a few hours of

tramping, home doesn't seem such a bad place after all."

"I wish I knew that Jimmy had changed his mind," said Nancy.

"It is more than likely that he has," said Aunt Charlotte, "so do not think much about it."

"He said it as if he meant it," said Nancy.

"And doubtless he did mean it when he said it," Aunt Charlotte returned; "but he talked boldly while the bright morning sun was shining; do you not see that at twilight he might think quite differently?"

Yes, Nancy thought so, and she hoped that Aunt Charlotte was right.

CHAPTER III

A DELIGHTFUL PLAN

MRS. Dainty felt that a change of scene was what they all needed. Mr. Dainty was in Europe on a long business trip, so that he would be absent from home the entire summer. If she took Aunt Charlotte Grayson with her, she would have a kind and considerate companion, and Dorothy and Nancy would be very happy together. She said nothing regarding her plans until Russell and Aline had completed their visit, but when "good-bys" had been said, and the brother and sister were speeding toward home, she called Aunt Charlotte to her cheery sitting

room, where, with Dorothy and Nancy as eager listeners, she unfolded her plans for a delightful summer.

“I think we should all enjoy a visit to the shore,” she said. “I have just received a letter from a friend, who tells me that, as she is going to the mountains for the summer months, she wishes to rent her cottage, ‘Crest Villa,’ and I propose to take it, and oh, will you think me hasty? I intend to occupy it a week from to-day.”

She laughed like a girl, and, indeed, Mrs. Dainty was very fair and young to look upon. Mrs. Grayson laughed, too, at her friend’s eager haste; but she willingly promised to be ready at any day or hour which pleased Mrs. Dainty, while Dorothy and Nancy could hardly express their delight.

“Just think of it,” said Dorothy, “a long

sail on the steamer, and when we get there, miles and miles of smooth, white sand. And up and down the beach, as far as you can see, ladies with fine gowns and gay parasols, and children with lovely frocks at play in the sunshine. There are carriages rolling along, filled with people who are laughing and chatting, while all the time the waves splash on the sand, and the foam looks white and sparkling in the sunshine."

"Oh, how fine to see it all!" said Nancy, much impressed by Dorothy's description, although there was much about it which she could not understand. She had never seen the shore; therefore, as she listened to Dorothy, she had a confused idea of gayly dressed people, afoot and in carriages, in constant parade upon a tract of wet sand, where no one could elude the in-

coming waves, and thus all must present a rather damp, not to say sloppy, appearance.

Yet Dorothy said it was delightful, and surely it promised a long and novel holiday; so she gave herself up to dreaming of the new joys to be tasted, and firmly believed that a season of bliss awaited them at Crest Villa.

It seemed to Dorothy that the day for starting never would arrive; but, like all anticipated days, it did at last come, and never was a day brighter or sunnier. As she stood with Nancy, waiting for the carriage, she danced because she could not keep still. Oh, the joy of a visit to the shore, and the pleasure of showing Nancy all the beauty to be seen, and enjoying her surprise and delight!

Four of the servants were to be with

them at Crest Villa, — the cook, the second girl, a maid, and John; the others remaining to care for the stone house and the adjoining cottage.

Dorothy wondered if they would ever really start, for one bag was overlooked, and the maid ran back for it. Then John remembered that he had left something in the stable, and hurried off to find it, but at last the trunks were all in place, the bags and suit cases collected, and Mrs. Dainty and Dorothy, Aunt Charlotte and Nancy were being driven to the depot, the servants following in the smaller carriage.

Dorothy's face looked very sweet under her broad-brimmed sailor, and Nancy's was quite as becoming.

"Only think, we'll soon be on the steamer," said Dorothy; "just a ride in

the cars to the city, and then before you know it we'll be at the wharf, and then in a minute we'll be on the deck of the steamer, with all the people who, like us, are going to the shore."

Nancy enjoyed the ride to the city. Did she not remember the long ride in the cars with the man who had stolen her from Aunt Charlotte? Every turn of the wheels had taken her away from those she loved. Now, they were starting upon a pleasure trip, were enjoying it together; ah, that made the difference. She looked from the window at the landscape, which seemed to be flying past them, and hummed a merry tune.

"What are you singing?" asked Dorothy, leaning toward Nancy, thus to look from the same window.

"I didn't think what it was till you

asked me," said Nancy, "and just for a moment I couldn't remember, but now I know. It's a tune that the orchestra used to play for me to dance to. You don't know what a pretty tune it was, because they played cymbals and drums and a triangle with it, and it always sounded jolly. When I danced to it, I forgot how lonely I was. I thought only of the bright flowers which people threw to me, of the music and the steps which I had practised."

Dorothy's eyes opened wide. She had never heard Nancy speak like that, never had seen her so excited.

"Oh, Nancy, you *don't* wish you could be there again, to hear the music, and to dance, do you?" she asked anxiously. Could it be that their delightful home life seemed tame compared with that other

life of constant excitement? But Nancy quickly reassured her.

“Wish I was there with those people who were so unkind to me?” she asked in surprise. “I guess I don’t wish I was anywhere but with you all whom I love so dearly. What if I did dance in a bright, fancy costume to the sweet, merry music? That was just a little while each evening. All through those long days I was homesick and lonesome, and I never had any pleasant people to talk to; I just lived in those rooms and longed and longed to be here. Oh, I’d never want to be there again, Dorothy. Here with you, every moment in the day I’m happy. Who wouldn’t be glad enough to stay with such dear friends?”

CHAPTER IV

CREST VILLA

THE steamer with its great smoke-stacks, its whistle, its churning of the waves into a track of foam which floated far behind them, these things were new and wonderful to Nancy, and Dorothy shared her admiration of the passing steamers, the yachts whose sails gleamed in the sunlight as they seemed to dance upon the water. Sometimes the passengers upon passing vessels waved their handkerchiefs, and Dorothy and Nancy waved theirs in return. It seemed to Nancy that she would like to spend many days upon the steamer, but when

she said so, Dorothy reminded her that they were all very eager to see Crest Villa, and that the beautiful beach was yet to be seen.

When at last they reached the landing, and saw the barges waiting to convey people to the hotels and cottages, the venders crying their wares to attract the transient guests who came to spend the day in sight-seeing, the fine carriages driving down to the pier, the gayly dressed people, they thought that they had never seen anything so exciting.

It was quite a long drive to Crest Villa, and all along the route there were fine hotels and beautiful residences. The long stretch of beach gleaming in the sunlight was dotted with groups and single figures in dainty gowns, gayly

flowered hats, and bright-hued parasols, and Nancy declared that it looked like a huge flower bed in full bloom.

“But the people keep moving about,” said Dorothy; to which Nancy replied:—

“Well, flowers blow in the wind, and their parasols and hats bob about like bright blossoms all over the beach.”

There was another surprise in store for Nancy when they reached the villa, for Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte had spoken of it as a summer cottage, saying that they should all enjoy cottage life better than being in one of the large hotels, and Nancy’s idea of a cottage was a tiny house of four or five rooms. Now Crest Villa was the summer home of one of Mrs. Dainty’s friends, a woman of great wealth and culture. It was a beautiful house, the twenty rooms of

which were furnished and decorated in exquisite taste.

As they drove up to the door, Nancy looked in surprise at the great house, its large piazzas and balconies, and she turned to Aunt Charlotte as she said:—

“Do they call a big house like *that* a cottage here? Why, if that’s a cottage, how large are their *houses*? ”

Mrs. Dainty was amused.

“Do you think there will be room enough for you and Dorothy to have a fine time in?” she asked; and Nancy’s answer pleased her.

“I could be happy in one room with Dorothy,” she said; “and so perhaps in twenty rooms I shall be twenty times as happy.”

“Indeed we shall,” said Dorothy; and together they made a tour of the rooms.

They were all very charming, but the one which pleased them best was the drawing-room, with its soft tones of rose color, its dainty water-colors upon the wall, its touches of gilt, and its broad, low windows looking out upon the beach. They ran from window to window, trying to decide if one offered a finer view than another, and always coming back to the largest window, under which there was a fine balcony. The view from the broad piazza was almost as fine, and Dorothy said that she could not choose between the shore and the country because she loved and admired both.

The sunny days they spent upon the beach, and on cloudy days they sat by the window and watched the vessels out at sea. Often each chose a vessel which moved along the horizon with wind-filled

sails, and then it was rare fun to name an imaginary freight which each was bringing into port.

Crest Villa stood apart from other residences, its nearest neighbor being a large hotel. The Cliff House appeared to be filled with guests, and there seemed always to be an overflow of patrons who could not find rooms and thus were obliged to live on the piazzas. All day, from morning until night, they swung in the hammocks, walked up and down the verandas, until Nancy declared that they must be overworked.

Aunt Charlotte assured her that it was not at all likely that the same people walked all day, but Nancy insisted that she and Dorothy had watched them until they knew many of the guests by sight.

“There’s a woman that we call Mrs.

Pink Stripe who walks and sits out there all day. She has a little girl that she's always saying 'Don't, dear,' to. So we call her 'Don't, dear,' because we don't know her name, and she can't hear us, so it doesn't matter."

"And there's a gentleman with a bright red tie and a broad-brimmed hat who has very long hair," said Dorothy, "and a very fat man who wears a plaid suit. He stands on the steps almost all day with ever so many golf sticks, but he doesn't play. He only stands there in his golf suit, and the people look at him as they pass."

"And there are some girls that go in bathing every day, and another girl that sits on the sand and watches them," said Nancy.

"You seem to know a great deal about

our neighbors," said Mrs. Dainty; "but tell me with whom were you talking this morning, Dorothy. I saw you and Nancy in the driveway near the stable, talking with two girls who were strangers, I thought."

"They are stopping at the hotel," said Dorothy, "and they saw us and came over. They said they wished to be acquainted with us."

Mrs. Dainty was not pleased. She did not like the appearance of the two girls, and preferred to choose friends for Dorothy rather than to have acquaintances thrust upon her.

"You must not be rude to them," she said; "you will, of course, treat them kindly if they come again, but see as little of them as possible until I know who they are. I have some acquaintances here at

the shore, and soon you and Nancy will have as many friends as you wish among people whom I know and wish you to meet."

So it happened that when Mrs. Dainty and her friends had exchanged calls, their little daughters came often to see Dorothy and Nancy, and a gay life began, which made each day seem brighter than the one before.

One sunny morning Dorothy sat upon the sand, a group of girls around her. Nancy sat near her, and the others of the party were Fay Burnham, Vera Vane, and Rita Warrenton. They were charming girls and as different in appearance and disposition as any three girls could be. Fay Burnham was bright, fair, and merry as the dancing waves, always ready for a frolic, and always good-tempered.

Vera Vane, sunny-haired and bright-eyed, was sometimes called the "weather-vane," because she was so full of changing moods. She was wont to be hasty and a bit ill-tempered, and if she became provoked over some trifling thing, she would look so angry that one would wonder what would pacify her. Ten minutes later she would be laughing as gayly as if nothing had occurred to ruffle or disturb her.

"Of course I was provoked," she would say with a laugh, "but I am not in the least provoked now;" and her friends would laugh with her, and call her the merry weather-vane.

Rita Warrenton was sweet and gentle, quieter than the others, yet full of fun and wit, and always a merry companion. As they sat upon the sand listening to the tale which Dorothy was telling, they

formed a pretty group. They were dressed in bathing costumes, and were waiting for Mrs. Dainty's maid, who was to chaperone the little party while it enjoyed a dip.

Dorothy was telling of Venus rising from the sea, as her mamma had told it to her, and the other girls were listening with delight, for Dorothy told it well, describing Venus as she appeared in a French painting which hung in the parlor at the stone house : —

“She has gauzy drapery about her, and it has soft rainbow colors, rose and straw color and palest blue, and in her hair and about her neck are strings of pearls. The foam and spray are beautifully painted, and she seems to be standing on the crest of a wave. The sun shines upon her, and her smile is as bright as the sunlight.”

They had enjoyed Dorothy's story, and

were delighted to think that some day they should see the lovely picture which she had so clearly described. Their mothers were valued friends of Mrs. Dainty, and were to be her guests during the winter. Fay was about to ask Dorothy for another story when Rita cried, "Here's the maid, Dorothy ; now for our dip."

They did not venture out into the breakers, but were contented to dance about in the shallow pools left by receding waves, or wading out toward in-coming breakers, and scampering back, chased by the big rollers. The maid stood upon the sand, holding Dorothy's and Nancy's bath cloaks, and seeing that the girls were not tempted to stay in too long. She held her watch in her hand and looked firmly determined to obey her mistress's orders as to the length of time allowed for a dip.

Just as the girls were most enjoying the fun, she called sharply to them.

“Oh, do let us stay a little longer,” pleaded Dorothy.

“You may stay five minutes longer,” said the maid. “I called you a bit too early because it most generally takes you ’bout that time to get started to come out er the water.”

“Five minutes!” exclaimed Nancy. “Five minutes! I’ll tell you what we’ll do with it! Come up on the sand where the water is shallow and I’ll show you an easy dancing step; you could learn it in a minute. Then we’ll join hands and we’ll dance it in a row. Come, let me show you.”

They needed no urging. The step was indeed an easy one, and the girls were bright pupils. They clasped hands, and

in a graceful line they skipped to the lilting measure which Nancy sang. It was a pretty sight. The maid was entranced, but one watched the girls with disapproval, — one whose shallow nature failed to see the grace and beauty of the innocent pastime. She was a guest at the Cliff House, and Dorothy and Nancy had often seen her. Dorothy had not noticed her, but Nancy had seen her, and she whispered to Dorothy, that the others might not hear the odd name by which they had always spoken of the woman.

“Just look at Mrs. Pink Stripe,” whispered Nancy; “she looks as if we were dancing upon something which belonged to her.”

“She does look very cross,” said Dorothy. “I wonder if she is angry with me.”

“With you?” said Nancy. “Why should she be? She doesn’t know us.”

“I know she doesn’t,” said Dorothy, “but this morning when you were up in Aunt Charlotte’s room talking with her, I ran out to the stable to speak to John. Mamma wished him to do an errand, and when I had told him, and was running toward the house, a girl looked over the fence and asked me to come over to the hotel. She said she would like to know us, and that her mother had told her to invite me. She pointed toward the hotel piazza, and there sat Mrs. Pink Stripe! The girl said that her name was Imogene; she didn’t say what her other name was, so I suppose we’ll have to think of her as Imogene Pink Stripe, until we find out what it really is.”

“You didn’t go, did you?” said Nancy.

"I couldn't. I knew mamma wouldn't wish it, so I thanked her for inviting me; but she made me say why I wouldn't go with her, and I had to tell her that mamma would not wish me to go where she was not acquainted."

"What did she say?" Nancy questioned.

"She just said, 'Well, you needn't,' and she looked very cross and ran back to the hotel."

It was evident that the woman was displeased, but her wrath seemed to be directed toward the group rather than to Dorothy alone. Nancy had spoken so quietly to Dorothy that the other girls had not heard what was said. Mrs. Pink Stripe, as Nancy called her, had moved nearer to the group, and her unpleasant face and manner were soon noticed.

"Who do you suppose that lady is who

stands watching us and looking so disagreeable?" questioned Fay; to which Vera replied, "Haven't an idea who she can be, but I don't think a *lady* would stand scowling like that."

"Perhaps the bright sunlight makes her frown," ventured Rita, gently; but a moment after she looked toward the figure in its bright-striped gown, and softly exclaimed, "Oh!"

"What made you say that?" asked Vera. "Do you think you *do* know her after all?"

"I *don't* know her," said Rita, "and perhaps I ought not to tell, but you'll think it queer if I don't. She lives in our town, but not at all near us, and mamma never knew her, but one day she called and sent up her card. Mamma couldn't imagine why she had called, but she went

down to see her. I've forgotten what her errand was, but it was something about some kind of charity, and mamma gave her some money, and that part of it was all right; but her little daughter was with her, and she did such queer things that mamma was disgusted.

“She sat down at the piano and commenced to strum so loudly that mamma could not hear her own voice when she tried to speak. The lady said, ‘Don’t, dear,’ and the girl left the piano, but she went over to the bookcase and commenced taking out books to amuse herself. She soon left the books lying upon the floor, and began to pull the flowers about which mamma had prettily arranged in the jardinière. She chose a pink and placed it in the buttonhole of her coat. Her mother kept saying, ‘Don’t, dear,’ but she kept

right on doing horrid things until mamma was glad when they had gone.

“Yesterday she came over to our cottage and said that she had come to spend the afternoon with me, but we were just going out, and she went away looking angry. It could not be helped. We had guests whom we had promised to take out driving; it would have been rude for me to have stayed at home, but I’m afraid Imogene doesn’t know what is rude and what is not.”

“We’d think it horrid for a little child to go into a stranger’s house and pull things around as she did,” said Fay, “but she’s a girl as old as we are, and certainly should know better; and isn’t she bold to invite herself to Rita’s house when she isn’t at all acquainted with her?”

Thus they chattered as they left the beach, and it was plain to see that Mrs. Pink Stripe's little daughter was hardly on the high road to popularity.

CHAPTER V

DRIFTING

THEY sat upon the rocks, Dorothy and Nancy, Fay, Vera, and Rita. They were sorting the shells which they had collected, and comparing the beauty of one kind with that of another. They had found none of any value, but they had enjoyed gathering them, and some were exquisite in coloring.

“I shall give part of mine to Molly Merton,” said Dorothy.

“And some of mine are for Flossie Barnet,” said Nancy.

“Molly and Flossie are dear friends of ours. They’re fine playmates. You

shall see them when you come to visit us this winter, and I know you'll like them," Dorothy explained.

"We're sure to like them if they're half as nice as you and Nancy," said Rita, warmly; to which Nancy replied, "Well, they are nice, *almost* as dear as Dorothy. Nobody could be quite like Dorothy."

"You think that because you love me," Dorothy said with a blush.

"Then we all love you," said Vera, "for we all agree with Nancy."

Nancy had strung some tiny shells upon a silken cord which Aunt Charlotte had given her, and having tied the ends together, she placed it like a wreath upon Dorothy's sunny hair.

"I wondered what you were going to do with that string of shells," said Dorothy.

"You'd better wear them, Dorothy,"

said Vera; "they make you look like a mermaid."

"Then you'd better string some for yourselves, and we can play that we are sea-fairies," laughed Dorothy.

The idea pleased them, and they at once commenced to string the shells on stems of the long, wiry grass which grew in the hot sand. The sky was cloudless, and the wind, soft and gentle. The little vessels anchored near the shore rocked and danced in the sunlight, as if inviting one to come and take a sail.

They strung the shells for their hair, and Fay suggested that they make necklaces, "for surely mermaids would have some sort of jewellery," she said; and soon they were making long chains for their necks.

"Dorothy knows a lovely song," said

Nancy; "it's a mermaid's song, too. I've often heard her sing it at home. Sing it, Dorothy."

"Oh, do, do," they cried in eager chorus.

"You be the water queen and we'll be the sea-fairies in a ring about you," said Vera, "and you must sing the song which Nancy says is so lovely."

So with the sun shining upon her pretty shell-crowned head, and her arms extended toward her nymphs, Dorothy sang; her sweet voice was carried upon the light breeze so that a boy who sat below the rocks upon the sand looked up and saw the pretty picture.

"We are mermaids, fair and free,
Children of the waves are we,
'Midst the seaweed and the foam,
We delight all day to roam.

“When the moon is shining clear,
And the dazzling stars appear,
On the shore till break of day,
We will dance the hours away.”

Clasping Dorothy's outstretched hands, they danced again the pretty step which Nancy had taught them.

Open-mouthed, the boy upon the sand watched them, his eyes never leaving them until, tired with the dance, they seated themselves upon the rocks.

“My! But that was a pretty sight!” he ejaculated; and the startled girls looked about them to learn whence the voice came.

“He's down there,” said Fay Burnham, pointing to where a boy in rough fishing garb stood leaning against an old boat. The girls looked in the direction in which Fay pointed.

"I've seen him on the beach with a fisherman," said Vera; "they are 'most always carrying big baskets of fish, and sometimes they have a great wagon load of seaweed. The man leads the horse, and that boy rides on the top of the load."

"Do you suppose he owns a boat — that any of those that are bobbing out there in the sun are his? If they are, perhaps he would let us go out in one," said Vera, as she ran down over the rocks to where the boy sat watching them. They called to her, but she did not hear, or would not listen, they could not tell which.

"Do you suppose Vera is truly going to ask him?" questioned Nancy, "because," she continued, "neither Dorothy nor I could go in his boat if he

would let us. Mrs. Dainty told Dorothy never to venture out in a boat, and I promised Aunt Charlotte I wouldn't, and we don't know him."

"Vera says she knows who he is, but even if she does, mamma would be displeased if I went, so of course I shall not," said Rita.

Fay said nothing, but she looked longingly at the little boats and leaned over the rocks as if trying to hear what Vera was saying and, if possible, learn what the boy replied.

"You look 'mazin' pooty up there, you 'n' the other girls adancin' in the sun. Who's that girl with the yaller hair an' the white dress? She looks like the water-sprites my Uncle Nat tells 'bout."

"Her name is Dorothy Dainty," said Vera, "and it's odd that you thought we

looked like sea-fairies, for we were playing that we were mermaids dancing on the sand. Who is your Uncle Nat? Is he the man I've seen you with on the beach with a load of seaweed?"

"Yes, that's Uncle Nat. He ain't always gettin' seaweed though. He's the smartest fisherman hereabouts."

Young Nat would have talked on at greater length, would have told many tales of his uncle's prowess, but Vera could not wait to listen.

"Have you got a boat?" she asked; "is one of those pretty ones yours?" pointing to the little boats which rocked upon the waves.

"Nary one of 'em is mine," the boy replied, "but that 'ere boat with the nets on the seat is Uncle Nat's."

Vera looked at it with longing eyes.

It had floated out to the extreme length of its chain, and it seemed to Vera that nothing could be more delightful than to sit in that little boat and rock with the motion of the waves. She clasped her hands and looked eagerly at Nat.

“Could you, oh, could you pull it back on to the sand so that we could get into it? Wouldn’t your uncle just let us sit in it? It would stay right here, because it’s tied,” she urged.

The boy thought a moment. Uncle Nat had said that he did not wish any man to use his boat, but this surely was different. A man might go off with it and neglect to bring it back, but this pretty girl and her playmates, — very likely his uncle would say “yes,” if he were asked. Of course the boat would stay where it was, — the girls couldn’t row, and the

boat would remain fast. He looked at Vera's pretty face.

"I guess I'll let you," he said. "I'll wade out 'n' pull it in." He suited the action to the word, and as Vera saw the boat respond to his tugging, she turned toward her mates a radiant face.

"Come!" she cried, "he says we may sit in the boat if we wish to, and of course we do. Come! Come! Oh, what fun it will be!"

"We can't," they said; and Nancy shook her head that Vera might understand, but she was not to be refused.

"Come!" she cried, "I'm not going to row you 'way out from the land. I don't know how to use the oars, and besides, the boat is tied. Come! hurry, can't you?"

"We're not coming," said Rita, "and I wish you wouldn't go out in it."

“ ‘Fraid cat ! ’ Fraid cat ! ” called Vera ; and Fay, who was fond of her, ran to join her. The others begged her to remain, and while she was trying to decide whether to stay with them or to go with Vera, Vera, with Nat’s help, had stepped lightly into the boat, seated herself upon the pile of nets, and Nat was pushing it off into the water. She had wet her feet, for the boy had not drawn the boat wholly out of the water. He knew that if he did, he would find it hard to push it out again with the added weight of the girl. Her wet feet caused her no anxiety, however ; she was too light, too flighty, to give a thought to aught save the pleasure of the moment. Nat strained and tugged at the boat. He was a large, muscular boy, and at last, with a lurch which made Vera scream, it flew out into the water, and floated to the

limit of its chain. Vera clapped her hands with delight, and as she looked at the group on the rocks she thought that they must be thinking how foolish they had been to stay ashore and miss the fun which she was having.

When the boat floated back a trifle toward the shore, the chain was out of sight beneath the water, but when it floated out again, the chain became taut, and Vera saw that its length was pieced by an old rope knotted into a link. Seaweed clung to it, and hung a dripping fringe from which the bright drops glistened.

She tried in every way to show the girls what a delightful time they were missing. She sang gayly; she leaned from side to side, causing the boat to sway; she dipped her hands in the water, catching at the bits of seaweed which floated past.

“How silly they were,” she said; “it might just as well have been a boatful. Here I am, having a fine time; while they are sitting still on the sand, as we have sat a dozen times before.”

Nat watched her curiously.

“Girls are queer,” he muttered. “She’s tickled ter sit in that boat an’ jist float. Ye wouldn’t catch er boy doin’ that. There’s no fun bein’ on the water ’nless ye’ve lines an’ bait and go out far ’nough ter ketch suthin’.” On the rocks the girls were talking of Vera.

“I wonder how long she is going to stay out there?” said Fay Burnham; “she asked us to go with her, but she didn’t wait to see if we were intending to. ’Tisn’t much fun to sit here and watch her. I wish I’d gone with her.”

“Well, I don’t wish I had,” said Rita

Warrenton, "for mamma has said that she is unwilling to have me out on the water unless some one besides just girls is with me. I wouldn't do exactly different from what she says."

Dorothy was about to speak, when a familiar voice called her.

"Miss Dorothy! Miss Dorothy!" Mrs. Dainty's maid stood calling and beckoning, and Dorothy ran toward her. She soon returned, saying: "Mamma and Aunt Charlotte are going for a drive, and we are to go with them. Come, Nancy, we'll have to gather up our shells, for the maid says we must hurry."

Nancy was always delighted to ride along the beach behind the handsome horses, and waiting for no urging, she gathered her own shells and helped Dorothy with hers. Standing upon the rocks,

they waved their hands to Vera, who returned their salute. She thought that they were urging her to return, and shook her head, that they might understand that she had not had nearly enough of her boating. Dorothy turned, and with Nancy hurried toward home.

"Tell Vera that we couldn't stay until she came back," she cried; and the others promised; but after they had gone, Fay and Rita became impatient.

"'Tisn't much fun sitting here and waiting for Vera," said Fay, "and I don't see why we should. We told her not to go out there, but she seemed to think it nicer than staying with us."

"And she *keeps* staying," agreed Rita; "let's call her an' tell her we're tired of waiting."

It was not that they were so far away

from Vera, but the wind blew toward the land and carried their words away from her instead of toward her, so that while all that *she* said was heard by Fay and Rita, Vera could not hear one word which they were calling.

They told her that they were going home, and urged her to come with them. She saw their gestures, but, failing to hear what they said, she believed that they were envious of her pleasure, and that that was the reason for wishing her to return. Vera was inclined to be obstinate, and she was annoyed that the girls had not entered the boat with her, so she shook her head and turned from them to look out across the water. She wished them to understand that she was not at all interested in what they were saying. It was now their turn to be angry.

“If Vera doesn’t care to listen to us, or even look at us, I guess we needn’t stay here,” said Fay; to which Rita responded: “It seems queer to go off, but we’ve told her we were going, and she seems not to care. I don’t know what time it is, but I think I can’t stay much longer. Let’s call ‘good-by’ to her, and perhaps that will make her come back.”

“Good-by!” they shouted again and again. If Vera heard them, she chose to pretend that she did not, and after waiting some time, the two girls left the rocks. They did not like thus to leave her, but both felt that they should be starting toward home, and truly, Vera had been very provoking.

For a long time she sat watching the distant vessels, determined not to turn toward her friends, lest they might think

that she had relented. A shout from Nat made her look that way. He was hurrying away up the beach. He placed his hand to his mouth and shouted to her.

"I'll be back in a jiffy," he said. "I've jist thought of a arrant; 'twon't take me long. 'Fore ye know it I'll be back," and without waiting for Vera to answer, he hurried away.

Now she was quite alone, and the sunlit water, the dancing waves, the boat which tugged at its chain, seemed less desirable than she had thought. While Nat sat watching her, while the girls were looking at her, she had fancied that she was having a delightful time. She now understood what Rita and Fay had meant; they had been telling her that they were tired of sitting on the rocks, and were urging her to join them. Nat

had been there then, and he could have drawn the boat to shore, and have helped her to land. Now that she was willing to look up toward the rocks, not a girl was to be seen. Even Nat had gone; but then he was to return in no time. He had said so. The moments began to drag, however. Where *could* that boy be? How tiresome that he should have thought of an errand at the very time when she would like to be on the shore! Was that Nat in the distance? She strained her eyes to see. No, it was an object which she remembered she had seen earlier in the day. Whatever it was, it was not a boy, and neither Nat nor any one else was in sight.

The broad stretch of beach was always thronged with people, but this was a little cove, apart from the thoroughfare, and

few people were interested to visit it. The girls had thought it a fine playground. Vera was fast becoming impatient; she wished that she had never seen the place. Again she looked in the direction in which Nat had vanished. He was not in sight. She leaned over and caught at the chain, and tried to pull the boat toward land. She had no other thought than that she had been in the boat quite as long as she wished. She was sure Nat would soon return, but she did not intend to wait for him. Her efforts to pull the boat in were unavailing, but she succeeded in doing one thing which she never dreamed of.

The rope which pieced out the chain was rotted with constant soaking, and even as she pulled at it, it was giving way. She was now completely out of

patience. She felt herself abused. The girls had been very unkind — they might have waited for her — and Nat was simply outrageous.

She would get ashore without any assistance from him. He should see when he returned that she had not needed him. She gave one angry tug at the chain, and sat down in the bottom of the boat, — the rope had parted, and the little craft, freed from the detaining chain, flew seaward with the receding tide.

At first Vera stared with wide eyes at the shore, at the rocks, at the place where she had last seen Nat; then her voice returned, and she shouted for help. Then down on the pile of nets she sank, and cried from sheer helplessness.

When Nat had done the errand which

he had happened to remember, he hurried back to where he had left Vera, and stood, with open mouth, when he discovered that the girl and the boat had vanished. The errand had taken much longer than he had thought, and he had expected a scolding from an angry girl; but this was worse than a scolding. She had managed, so he thought, to unfasten the boat, and as a light pair of oars lay in it, she had rowed away. No fear for Vera's safety entered his mind. His only fear was a selfish one.

“She made me think she couldn't manage a boat,” he growled. “Pooty mess for me! She's gone off with Uncle Nat's boat, nobody knows where. Won't I ketch it when he finds it out? Wall, I shan't hurry ter tell him. Fust time I see her I'll make her tell me where 'tis, an' if

she was a boy, I'd pay her well fer doin' such a trick."

He slouched down-the beach toward Uncle Nat's cottage ; but when he entered, he omitted mentioning the missing boat.

CHAPTER VI

VERA

IN the bottom of the boat upon the fish-nets Vera lay, crying as if her heart would break. She had called for help until, seeing that all such effort was useless, she sank on the damp nets, a sorry little heap.

What use was there in shouting? There was no one to hear her, no one to notice the waving handkerchief. She was sure that she should float quite out to sea, and that those who loved her would never see her again. She was a nervous, excitable girl, always very happy or very miserable.

Surely, now, she had good reason for being much frightened, and she gave herself up completely to her fear. She cried as she had never cried before ; cried until she thought she had not a tear left ; cried until she was actually worn out, and, frightened though she was, she fell asleep.

As twilight came, Mrs. Vane began to wonder where Vera might be. She knew that she had been with Fay and Rita, but she had seen the two girls pass the house just before the clock chimed four. She had not been surprised that Vera was not with them. She well knew her child's fickle disposition, and supposed that, tiring of Fay and Rita, she had joined some friend, possibly Dorothy Dainty, of whom she was very fond.

In haste she sent a servant to Mrs. Dainty to learn if Vera were there. Mrs. Dainty had not yet returned from her drive; Dorothy and Nancy were with her, but Vera had not been at Crest Villa, the servant said.

Mrs. Vane sent the woman to Mrs. Burnham's house, and then to the hotel where Mrs. Warrenton was staying. Neither lady had seen Vera; and when Fay and Rita were questioned, they told of Vera's determination to stay in the boat, and that Nat was there with her to drag the boat ashore as soon as she wished to land.

Now thoroughly frightened, Mrs. Vane sent a man-servant with the maid to see if Vera and her companion were still at the cove, and when they returned, saying that neither Vera, the boy, nor the

boat was there, the mother's fear was pitiful.

And Vera ?

“Now, lad, we'll go out and make things taut for the night. Bring a lantern along, for while it ain't dark, yit it ain't very light. Come, come, lad, start up !”

The speaker, a rough, good-natured fisherman, stood waiting for the boy, whose book so interested him that he was loath to leave it.

“Wait till I see what the divers did when they found the treasure at the bottom of the sea. It's goin' ter tell at the top er the next page.”

“I can't wait whilst ye read such stuff as that,” said the man. “I want ter git the chores done early. When the chores is done, ye kin read.”

"It'll be time ter go ter bed, then," grumbled the boy, as he put down his book and took the lantern from its peg. The doings of the diver in the book which he was reading rivalled the tales of seafaring life which his uncle told.

After the horse and cow had been fed, they left the barn, locking the door securely. "Now kin we go in?" questioned the boy.

"Soon's we've been down ter the beach. I made the boat fast, I know, but as long's ye've got the lantern I'll jest take er look at it. Here, gimme the lantern. I'll go ahead, and you foller on."

Nat Trelton strode down toward the shore, the boy lagging behind, impatient of the numerous tasks which kept him from his delightful book. The boat was exactly as it had been left, and young Nat

was just thinking that it had been a needless errand, when a cry from his uncle led him to hurry toward him to see what had caused him such evident surprise.

Nat Trelton stood holding his lantern above his head, that he might make sure that the light was not blinding him, or that his eyes were not deceiving him.

“Where in time did she come from?” he exclaimed; and Nat, who now stood beside his uncle, stared in wonder and amazement. A boat had been washed ashore upon the sandy bar upon which they lived, and in the boat lay a girl, sound asleep.

“Mus’ b’long ter some er the ’ristycrats hereabouts,” said Trelton; “her face an’ hands shows that; an’ look at them clothes! None er our neighbors’ children wears any fine duds like them.”

“No, sir-ee!” agreed Nat.

His shrill voice awoke Vera, for Vera it was, and she sat up, rubbing her eyes and blinking in the lantern's light. For a moment neither spoke, and then, in an instant, she remembered all about the drifting, and her own fright.

"Oh, where am I?" she cried, "and who are you?" She reached over the side of the boat.

"Oh, I'm not on the hateful water, am I? I thought I'd never see land again; but where is this?"

"This is Sandy Bar ye've drifted on ter. My home's close by; ye'd better let us take ye there. My wife'll know what ter do fer ye."

Go with him? His face, if rough, was kindly, and to be away from the boat and the water, to walk on dry land and see a house of any kind, was delightful. She

placed her hand in his and was glad to feel its strong grasp.

Mrs. Trelton looked up in surprise when the door opened and Nat entered leading a pretty girl by the hand.

“Here’s a visitor for ye as was sent up by the waves,” he announced, “an’ she’s been out all the afternoon. I guess some supper’d come handy.”

“I’m so hungry,” said Vera, and Mrs. Trelton waited for no urging. “I ain’t got nothin’ fine,” she said, “but such as ’tis, yer welcome ter.”

“Our cook says I’m fussy, but I’d like *anything* to-night,” said Vera, “and oh, I wonder how far it is to get home!”

“Don’t ye worry ’bout that,” said Nat. “I’ll take ye home, wherever ’tis; ye jest fall to an’ eat what ma set afore ye, an’ when ye’ve done, then we’ll talk.”

She took his advice, and oh, how good that supper tasted! Crackers and milk, a piece of gingerbread and some corn muffins. At home she would have turned in disgust from such a meal, had it been offered her, but hunger is a good appetizer, and for once she was really hungry.

“An’ now who be ye, an’ how came ye here?” questioned Mrs. Trelton as Vera turned from the table to thank her hostess.

“I’m Vera Vane,” she said, “and I belong at the cottage called ‘The Weather-vane.’ Papa named it for me. He calls me a weather-vane because I so often change my mind about things. I can’t help it. I can’t think just the same always. To-day I thought there never was anything so fine as a boat. Now I never want to be on the water again.”

“That’s ’cause ye’ve had er dose of it

this time," said Nat, with a laugh, in which the boy joined.

"I've been tryin' ter think where 'tis ye live," he continued, "an' now I know. It's the big place with er windmill up back er the house, an' pooty nigh twenty piazzas on ter it."

It was Vera's turn to laugh. "It hasn't twenty," she said, "but it has a number; and the tall windmill stands at the back. Oh, when will you take me home? To-night? Oh, will you take me to-night?"

"I'll take ye as soon's ye tell me how ye happened ter be in such a fix."

So Vera told her story, and Nat found it so interesting that he quite forgot the tale which he had so longed to read. He believed that Vera had deliberately rowed away from the cove, and that a good scolding awaited him as soon as his uncle should

learn that his boat had been stolen. Now that the boat had come ashore he would undoubtedly escape with a brief reprimand. It was for no especial reason that Vera failed to tell that Nat had permitted her to enter the boat. She had for the moment forgotten aught save her fright while drifting.

When Vera had finished her story, Nat harnessed the horse and brought the wagon around to the door, while Vera permitted Mrs. Trelton to wrap a coarse, woollen shawl about her. The evening air was chilly, and Nat assured her that it was a long drive to her home. He knew the most direct way, as he often went over the route to sell the fish which he had caught.

It was rather a silent ride. Vera was very tired, and Nat had had a long day's

fishing. He could have sheltered Vera for the night and have taken her over to The Weather-vane in the morning, but he knew that she was eager to reach home, and that her family were anxious about her, so he set forth with his fair little guest beside him, the lantern swinging at the side of the wagon to light the way.

The Vane household was in confusion. Vera's father and brother had organized a searching party, and were out on the beach hunting in every direction for the missing girl. The servants were anxious. Vera, with her changeful disposition and countless whims, was not a favorite with them, but they were not heartless, and the thought that she was lost, perhaps drowned — oh, it was too horrible to be thought of! They whispered together, wondering if

she would be found, and sincerely pitying their mistress, whom they loved and faithfully served.

Mrs. Vane, with a white face and tearless eyes, walked from room to room, now looking out into the night, now listening for a sound of footsteps. Everywhere were reminders of careless, thoughtless Vera. Her gloves lay upon the table; she had forgotten to put them where they belonged. A collection of shells lay upon the piano, covered by a sheet of music. A breeze from an open window had blown the music aside, and the shells lay revealed. Mrs. Vane looked at them, and the first tears which she had been able to shed filled her eyes.

Strange to say, with the tears came relief and a ray of hope. It might be that they would find her.

At the sound of footsteps she hurried to the door, but when Mr. Vane and Rob entered the hall, Vera was not with them, and she saw by their faces that they had no news of her. She clung to her husband, while Rob stood by, miserably aware that he had no word of comfort to offer.

The sound of a wagon startled the group. It had stopped at the gate. Was it some unimportant errand, or could it be news of Vera? Whoever it was, was coming up the walk, was on the piazza.

Rob opened the door, and Vera rushed in, her companion standing upon the threshold, hat in hand, a pleased witness of the meeting.

“Oh, I am so glad to be home! He brought me,” said Vera, “and was so kind to me.”

Mr. Vane grasped the fisherman's rough hand as he insisted that he enter and tell them the story of Vera's adventure.

Nat Trelton might have felt ill at ease in the fine house with its costly furnishings, but the warm welcome given him reassured him, and he told of finding Vera, of the warm supper and homeward trip, in simple fashion, ending by saying:—

“Ye needn't say too much. I only done what I'd want er feller-man ter do fer one er my children ef he had the chance.”

“But we feel that you have done a priceless favor for us, and that in return we should like to give you something which shall show how truly grateful we are,” said Mr. Vane. But Nat Trelton would not listen, and hastily moved toward the door.

“I’m glad ’nough ter hev made ye happy, but I don’t want ter take no reward. I’d ’most feel like one er them usurers they tell ’bout. She’s one er yer most val’able pieces er prop’ty, an’ I’m glad it fell ter my lot to return her safe and sound.”

He stepped out into the night, his honest heart glad that he had made them happy, and thankful that he had withstood the temptation to accept a reward. He was not above the need of money, but as he walked the path to the gate and clambered into his wagon he whispered :—

“Ye ain’t overstocked with money, Nat Trelton, but ye ain’t mean ’nough to take it fer returnin’ er lost child, a job any decent man ought ter be glad ter do.” But the honest fisherman was to have a reward of which he little dreamed.

One sunny morning a snug new fishing craft swung at anchor near the shore of Sandy Bar. Young Nat was the first to see it. From his little attic window he espied it, and in great excitement dressed and hurried out to see what stranger had arrived. A man was polishing a bit of brass work, and when he saw Nat he called to him:—

“I say, boy, do ye know where I’ll find Cap’n Nat Trelton?” he shouted.

“Guess I do,” Nat answered; “he’s my uncle.”

“Wal, ye jest tell him I want ter see him ter oncet, fer I’m ter deliver this ’ere craft ter him,” shouted the man.

Nat ran home with all speed, and his uncle, declaring that he could not have heard correctly, followed him down to the shore to learn what it meant.

There she was, her sails white in the sunlight.

"She's a beauty, whoever she b'longs ter," he exclaimed in genuine admiration. "I declare, I never seen a pootier sight 'n her, er ridin' on the waves an' everything 'bout her as spick an' span as er new pin."

Nat had hurried homeward to give the message, but as he had not said that he intended to return, the man had started to follow him. He saw the man and boy as they stood looking at the craft, and hastened toward them.

"Be ye Cap'n Nat Trelton?" he asked, touching his cap.

"That's my name, an' I'm wonderin' who the owner er that 'ere craft may be."

"I'm come from Mr. Robert Vane ter tell ye that ter-day the owner er that 'ere

boat is Cap'n Nat Trelton, an' he gives it ter ye in rec'nition er yer bringin' home Miss Vera, safe an' sound."

"Man! Be ye speakin' the truth?" cried Trelton, as he grasped the fellow's arm and looked into his face.

"The truth, Cap'n; an' ter prove it, look at her name in gold letters there."

"*The Vera Vane!*" gasped Trelton; "why, man alive, I'm rich, rich with such a craft as that! My old boat wasn't good for much, but with that one ter put ter sea with, I kin do wonders. I kin hardly b'lieve it yit."

"Ye'll hev ter, fer she's yourn, fair an' square. Mr. Vane is rich, an' he's able ter make the gift. He thinks well of ye. Ye'd ought ter hear him talk," said the man.

"I guess I'm due at his house ter tell

him what I think er him. I declare, I do'no' how ter thank him, but I'm going straight over there ter try;" and his voice choked with emotion.

"Take me with ye," said Nat; "I'd like ter see the man what could buy a boat like that, and give it away," but Captain Trelton thought it best to make his call unattended.

CHAPTER VII

NANCY ENTERTAINS

CAPTAIN TRELTON walked bravely up to the gates which opened into the grounds of The Weather-vane, and strode up the path. He was about to ring the bell when a cheery voice greeted him, and he turned to grasp Mr. Vane's outstretched hand.

"I'm come ter tell ye how grateful I be," he said, "though land knows I do'no' how ter thank ye properly fer such er gift. I never expected ter own such er craft, an' when yer man told me she was mine, I thought him or me was dreamin'."

“Neither of you was dreaming, Captain Trelton,” said Mr. Vane; “the boat is yours, and I am truly glad to know that you are pleased with her. It is a present from Mrs. Vane and myself, and when we think of Vera’s danger we feel that our gift is but a slight return for your service to us.”

“Wal, again I thank ye, fer nothin’ else could have pleased me half as much, but yer little daughter, ef she’d only known it, was in *some* danger, but not much, fer while she *could* er drifted out ter sea, she wasn’t likely ter; Sandy Bar stretches out so far across the cove that it was een a’most impossible for her ter keep from driftin’ on ter it.” The captain paused. He had done what he thought honest; he could not let Mr. Vane consider him a greater hero than he really was.

“But who found and cared for her on Sandy Bar? Who hastened to bring her to us at the earliest possible moment? It was your honest self, Captain Trelton, and I am proud to claim you for a friend,” said Robert Vane, heartily.

Nat Trelton was deeply moved, and later, when he made his way homeward along the sandy road he believed that there lived no man so royally generous as Robert Vane.

Vera was not disposed to have her adventure thought of so lightly.

“I *might* have drifted out to sea,” she often said; “I didn’t, but I might have;” and her friends and playmates were much impressed. She was a restless girl, whose changing moods were hard to follow. A game which one day delighted her af-

forded no pleasure for her on the next. If on one day she was pleased to gather shells, on the next she wondered how any girl could be thus amused; and so it happened one sunny morning that there was nothing with which she could be occupied. She did not wish to bathe, the water was too cold. She could not enjoy the beach, —any one could see that the sun was too hot and glaring. She was not unpleasant in her discontent; she was simply wondering if there were anything new with which she could be amused, and while she was thinking about it, she met Dorothy and Nancy.

“Come with us,” cried Dorothy; “we’re planning a fine time — something which we never did before. We’re going to the stable. Come!” and Vera followed, wild with curiosity as to what they were to do.

Their arms were filled with so many things that Vera could not wait until they reached the stable to have her questions answered.

“What are you going to do with all those things?” she asked; but the girls laughed and hurried on, promising to answer her questions later. Dorothy placed her parcel upon a large box, while Nancy packed her bundle beside it.

“Now I’ll tell you what we’re going to do,” said Dorothy, while Nancy, standing beside her, wondered if Vera would be as interested as Dorothy expected.

“Nancy has planned the greatest bit of fun,” said Dorothy. “It’s a fine entertainment, and we’re to give it right here in this stable. We can have it finer here than in the house, because there’s ever so many things out here to do with that aren’t in any house.”

This was not quite clear to Vera, but it was mysterious, and that was charming. "John has hung this big blanket at the door for a curtain, and these things that we brought out here are for costumes. There's three shawls and a lot of bunting, some tinsel and all our strings of shells. I brought some flowers from the back garden, most of them sunflowers, because they are so showy, and see, John's putting up those flags now. Don't they look fine?"

Vera turned and watched John for a moment, as he worked at his task as decorator.

"Yes," she said, "they look pretty; but what is your concert, or whatever you call it, to be? Who's to take part? What are you two going to sing or speak?"

"I'm to sing two songs," Dorothy re-

plied, "and Rita Warrenton reads beautifully. She'll be here soon, and she's going to bring a book with her and read two pieces; she didn't say what they were to be. Fay says she would rather be in the audience with the other girls who are coming."

"I'm sure I'd like to enjoy the entertainment. I couldn't take part, but I shall like to see those who do. But one thing you haven't told yet; what is Nancy to do?"

"Her part is the best of all; she is to dance for us!"

"Oh, can you dance?" asked Vera; then before Nancy could answer she said: "Oh, I know you dance; one of the girls said something about it a few days ago. I've forgotten what she said. I was thinking of something else while she was

speaking, and I tried afterward to think what she said, but I couldn't remember."

John hung the flags at intervals upon the walls, and tacked a cluster of sun-flowers on every space between ; and when he had finished, he viewed his work with pride.

"It's a foine place ter hev the concert in. Oi declare it looks loike a grand theatre, wid its deckyrations an' its curt'n. I'm proud ter be one av them as may applaud."

Dorothy had promised John that if he would help them, he should surely be one of the audience.

Rita came running toward them with the book from which she was to read, and as they turned to greet her, they saw that a part of their audience was arriving. Vera was excited. She ran to Fay, who was opening the gate:—

“Did you ever dream of such a treat?” she cried. “I couldn’t think of any way to amuse myself this morning, when I met Dorothy and Nancy, and they were planning to amuse us all.”

Fay was as excited as Vera. “Let’s sit in the front row so we will see everything and hear every word,” she whispered, pushing Vera before her in her haste to secure front-row seats before the others, who were now coming up the walk, could obtain them.

John, with an eye to properly seating the guests, had placed rows of chairs and camp-stools, which had long been stored in the stable, and, as an extra row, a line of boxes for rear seats. The blanket curtain hung before the door, but, from behind it came sounds of preparation which made the waiting company more eager than ever for the opening number on the programme.

Behind the curtain, Dorothy, Nancy, and Rita were arranging their costumes, and discussing, in whispers, the choice of colors which each should wear.

Of the three girls, Nancy seemed least excited. She was fastening a sash made of bunting around Dorothy's waist, and it was Dorothy whom she seemed most eager to see becomingly dressed.

"I wish mamma and Aunt Charlotte had not gone to the city to-day," said Dorothy; to which Nancy whispered: "So do I; but we didn't know that they intended to until we'd made all our plans and told all the girls to come. We couldn't have put it off till another day, because the girls we had invited would have been disappointed, perhaps provoked."

"I wonder if all the girls have come yet," said Rita; "I'm going to peek."

She leaned toward a tiny space between the curtain and the door-frame, and looked out upon the waiting audience, and was surprised to see how many girls had arrived.

“Why, Dorothy Dainty!” she whispered, as she turned, “did you invite all those out there? You said that you and Nancy had asked a few to come, and I should think you had! There’s a hundred, I do believe. All the chairs are taken, and there’s ever so many standing and waiting for us to begin.”

Dorothy laid her shell necklace upon a box, and ran to take a peep at the crowd which Rita thought might be a hundred, and was surprised to see, besides the girls she had invited, many more whom she did not know.

Nancy agreed with Dorothy that it was certainly odd that strangers should have

come uninvited ; and, indeed, they had not. It was the invited guests who had behaved strangely. The girls whom Dorothy had invited had chosen to ask others to be present — girls whom *they* knew, but whom Dorothy did not.

Mrs. Dainty would have been surprised if she could have seen the assembled crowd, of whom but a small number were known to her or her little daughter ; while Aunt Charlotte would certainly have been amazed at the number of strangers so quickly collected. It was Nancy's turn to take a peep. She looked out, and hurried to Dorothy to whisper of what she had seen.

“There's Imogene Pink Stripe over there in the front row!”

“Why, I didn't see her,” Dorothy replied.

“Well, she’s there, and she looks as if she wasn’t very patient,” said Nancy.

“I didn’t invite her, nor any of the others whom we don’t know. Mamma wouldn’t like to have all those strangers here, but we can’t tell them to go away, and we’ve promised to give the entertainment, so we may as well begin,” said Dorothy; and John drew the curtain aside.

There were little gasps of delight, for the flags and gorgeous sunflowers really looked very festive, and added, so the children thought, to the fine effect. There was much whispering and guessing as to what the programme would be, but when sweet Dorothy came forward to the centre of the doorway to sing a solo, the little audience was all attention, and not a whisper could be heard. One could not

guess what Mrs. Dainty would have thought of Dorothy's costume, but the girls considered it fine. Over her white frock was tied a broad sash of blue bunting upon which gilt paper stars had been carefully glued. The toe of each slipper held a similar star, and countless strings of shells were about her neck and in her bright hair. She had a sweet voice, and her song was generously applauded.

The next number was a reading by Rita Warrenton. It was a short poem entitled "The Little Oriental," and Nancy and Dorothy had helped to arrange her costume. Her long, dark hair hung below her belt. Instead of a ribbon, a band of gilt passed quite around her head like a crown. She had brought some scarlet slippers, and over the buff frock which she wore was tied a broad sash of scarlet.

The girls thought this costume regal, and Rita, who read the verses with much taste, was happy to have pleased her friends.

Of all the girls not one seemed to enjoy the performance more than did Imogene. She sat upon the edge of her chair, her lips parted and her eyes shining. She had wished to know Dorothy and Nancy, for no better reason than that they were always tastefully dressed, that Crest Villa was one of the largest and handsomest residences in the place, and that Mrs. Dainty rode in a handsome carriage behind a span of fine horses. That Dorothy and Nancy were refined counted for nothing with Imogene. Had they been rude and disagreeable, she would have been quite as eager for their friendship. She only wished others to think that she

was an intimate friend of the children of Crest Villa. So when she saw the children hurrying through the gate, she followed them, determined to be one of the party.

There were other songs by Dorothy and more readings by Rita, and then it was Nancy's number. Her costume was the gayest of all. She had scarlet ribbons in her hair, and her white frock served to enhance the brightness of her red sash ribbon and scarlet stockings. There were red geraniums in her hair and upon her shoulders, and in her hand she carried a tambourine which Dorothy had taken from the wall of the music room, where it hung by long ribbons as a decoration.

Nancy's eyes were shining, and her red lips parted in a bright smile. She was about to give pleasure to her friends.



Shaking the tambourine above her head, she ran out and danced. — Page 115.

She had so many times danced for strangers who had paid much to see her; now freely she would dance for the pleasure it would give. She motioned for John to draw aside the curtain. A moment she waited; then, shaking the tambourine above her head, that its bells might tinkle merrily, she ran out and danced, to the wild delight of her audience.

She had no orchestra to play for her, no winsome violins, no triangle to mark the time for her flying feet, but she shook the tambourine, and rapped it smartly, that thus the rhythm might accord with her whirling, swaying figure.

Never had Nancy danced more gracefully. She swung the tambourine, she threw it above her head and nimbly caught it, the while her slippered feet did the most difficult steps, flying over

the floor as if they were bewitched. She danced toward them, smiling and courtesying low; then whirled away from them, looking over her shoulder and laughing gayly, and throughout the dance the bells of the tambourine made merry music for Nancy's nimble feet. Again she danced toward them, rocking upon the tips of her toes, shook the tambourine, bent toward the audience, making a graceful bow, and ran behind the curtain.

How they clapped their hands and called for Nancy, and, always willing to please, she returned to repeat a part of the dance.

She was performing the last pretty figure when a tall, angry-looking woman, clad in a pink-striped gown, strode up the path, and taking Imogene by the arm, drew her forcibly from her chair

Nancy hastily bowed, and then paused in surprise.

"Come right straight away," said the woman; "I never want you to go where you ain't wanted, an' I don't approve of any such performance as this."

In her haste to drag Inogene from her place, the woman turned quickly about, and her train overturned two of the chairs.

"Jest a minute, mum," said John; "ye've tipped over them chairs, an' it's kind er careless loike."

He was angry with the woman who had so rudely interrupted the children's pleasure.

"I never saw such goin's on," was the sharp reply. "It's high time something was tipped over if it would put a stop to such doin's," and she flounced out

of the gateway, dragging the unwilling Imogene with her.

"That's as much sinse as some folks has," grumbled the irate John, "ter make a fuss 'bout nothin', an' thry ter shpoil the little ladies' pleasure. Sure 'twas a innocent amusement."

The girls, both strangers and friends, crowded around Dorothy and Nancy, declaring that they had never had half so nice a time, and that that woman was just horrid to come in and make such a scene.

They praised Dorothy's singing and Rita's reading, but they could hardly express their delight in watching Nancy when she had danced for them. It had seemed fairylike, elfish, her graceful dancing. Oh, they never could tell her what a treat it had been, but Nancy

was quite satisfied. She heard their kind words, saw their bright, smiling faces, and knew that she had given them pleasure, so she was truly happy.

CHAPTER VIII

BUSYBODIES

FOR some time the girls remained to tell again and again the pleasure which the music and the dancing had given them, and when at last they had gone, Dorothy spoke of Imogene.

“They say the lady’s name is Raynor, but I always think of her as Mrs. Pink Stripe, the name we gave her when we first saw her on the hotel piazza. How could she be willing to rush in at the gate and seize Imogene so roughly, and talk so loudly?” said Dorothy; to which Nancy replied:—

“Well, she *did* do it, and I think she looks as if she could.”

It was quite true. Mrs. Raynor did look very rude and uncouth. One could have imagined it possible for Mrs. Raynor to do almost anything, and surely Imogene was permitted at all times to be as impolite as she chose. Her mother's sudden freak to discipline her seemed very odd and surprising unless one had known the reason for her extreme displeasure. She had wished, even insisted, that Imogene become acquainted with Dorothy Dainty. That they were strangers to Mrs. Dainty counted for naught with ambitious Mrs. Raynor. Therefore she sent Imogene to Crest Villa to invite Dorothy to come over to the hotel to play with her. Dorothy knew that she must not go, and gently and politely refused.

Imogene and her mother were at once very angry. When they found that Dorothy and her mamma made no effort to secure their acquaintance, they were, if possible, more angry; so when Mrs. Raynor learned that Imogene was at Crest Villa uninvited, she hastened there to show that she not only did not wish her to go there, but that she would not permit her to remain. It would have made no difference what the entertainment had been; she wished only for an opportunity to be unpleasant.

The beach was gay with many who, dressed in holiday attire, had journeyed to the shore to enjoy the ocean's beauty, and to bask in the sunlight upon the sand. There were also many of the summer colony who were out for their

daily stroll; the scene was full of light and beauty.

Dorothy, Nancy, and Fay were walking along the shore, sometimes stopping to pick up a shell, but always keeping watch for Vera, whom they had promised to meet.

"I don't see where she is," said Dorothy. "She said she'd leave the house at nine, and we were to do the same, and we'd keep walking until we met. We've almost reached The Weather-vane, and she isn't even in sight."

"P'raps she's forgotten all about it," said Rita.

"She promised," said Nancy, as if, having promised, Vera could not have forgotten.

"But Vera often promises and then doesn't do," replied Rita; "it isn't that

she doesn't intend to keep her promises, but she forgets."

"I don't see how any one can forget a promise," said Nancy, to which Dorothy replied : —

"Of course you don't, Nancy, for you'd keep one no matter how hard it was to keep."

"I know I would," said Nancy, "but Vera's different."

Nancy was quite right. Vera was very unlike either of these girls whom she called her friends, in that she made promises lightly and gave little thought to them afterward. Dorothy and Nancy had been trained to feel that they must think well before making a promise, but having made one, it must, if possible, be kept. If something occurred which made it impossible, then a good excuse must at once be given.

As they reached the gate of The Weather-vane they saw Mrs. Vane coming down the walk to enter the carriage which stood waiting. She greeted them cheerily.

“I think you must be looking for Vera,” she said, “and I am sorry that she is away when you have come to see her.”

“Away?” said Dorothy, her blue eyes looking the surprise which she felt.

“Away?” said Nancy, like an echo of Dorothy’s voice.

“She promised to meet us this morning,” said Rita; “we each were to leave home at nine and keep walking until we met. We did keep walking, and instead of meeting halfway, we are at the gate, and Vera has forgotten all about it.”

Rita felt aggrieved, and Mrs. Vane was

truly sorry that Vera should have treated her friends so shabbily.

"If Vera promised to meet you this morning, she must have forgotten a previous engagement to go out sailing with friends of mine who had invited her," she said. She talked very kindly with the girls, expressing her sincere regret for their disappointment. She stood in the gateway and watched them as they walked away toward the beach, then she turned and entered her carriage. She had spoken kindly to Vera's playmates; she would speak to Vera when she returned from the day's pleasure trip.

As they strolled along the shore they talked of Vera, and so interested were they that they did not notice two people who were coming toward them. Nancy saw them first.

"There's Imogene," she whispered. The other girls looked up, when, to their surprise, Mrs. Raynor and Imogene swept past them, their heads tipped so that they both looked quite over the heads of the three girls.

"How funny they looked with their noses in the air," said Rita, "and why did they wish to look so very disagreeable?"

Nancy thought they intended their unpleasantness for her, and indeed they were looking sharply at her before they had rushed so swiftly past; but Dorothy assured her that they were all included in Mrs. Raynor's evident displeasure.

"Imogene felt quite as cross," said Rita; "her nose turns up *all* the time, so she needn't have lifted it higher."

Dorothy was sure that Rita's speech did not sound at all nice, but it did sound

funny, and she laughed gayly, Nancy joining in her merriment.

As they made their way toward Crest Villa, they passed many friends who greeted them cheerily, and with whom they paused to chat. The beach was too crowded for any games. The children of the summer residents roamed the shore to enjoy the sunshine and to watch the ever changing crowd of gayly dressed people, but their games were played within the grounds which surrounded their homes.

One thing Dorothy noticed. Besides the girls with whom they were acquainted they met a number of those who, uninvited by Dorothy, had been present at the little entertainment. They had seemed pleased with the novel amusement; then why did they look so unpleasant now? No one could have seen them

without noticing their averted eyes and disagreeable bearing. What could it mean? To be sure, it did not matter greatly. Dorothy had many dear and interesting friends, and dearest of all was Nancy, yet it was not pleasant, and Dorothy, who was always sweet-tempered, and Nancy, who had a merry word for all, were puzzled and hurt.

Rita spent the remainder of the morning with them, and just before luncheon guests, whom Mrs. Dainty was expecting, arrived, so that, for a time, Dorothy quite forgot the strange happenings on the beach.

There was a large house-party, and while Aunt Charlotte Grayson helped Mrs. Dainty to receive and entertain, Dorothy and Nancy did their best to make the younger members of the party happy. When, after a week's festivities, the guests

departed, well pleased with their visit, Dorothy told of Mrs. Raynor and Imogene, and of the other girls who had acted so rudely.

“And only think, mamma, they are girls whom I don’t know; neither does Nancy. They came in to see our fine entertainment. Imogene’s mamma came and made her leave, but the others stayed and seemed to enjoy it.”

“Think as little as possible of their unkindness, and take no notice of their rude manners when you meet,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“But we can’t help seeing them, if they walk very near us and do as they did that day on the beach.”

“Try to appear as if you did not,” Mrs. Dainty said.

It was wise advice, surely, and quite a

task for a little girl to follow ; but Dorothy promised to do her best.

And what had caused such anger among the girls who had seemed so eager to know Dorothy and Nancy ? They wondered much about it, and thought it very puzzling ; yet one had not far to look to find those who had caused all the mischief. Mrs. Raynor was a woman who had little pride, and less refinement. She could, if she chose, be very pleasant, but she could also be very disagreeable. She treated those kindly who chanced to please her, but any one who displeased her was sure to feel the force of her anger.

Imogene was now very angry with Dorothy, Nancy, and Mrs. Dainty, and in her wilful way longed to do something which should annoy them — a very unkind thought, surely ; but Imogene was not

sweet or lovable, and she had always done quite as she pleased. She was just wondering what she could do which would be especially annoying to Dorothy, when, as she ran along the hall of the hotel and stepped out upon the piazza, she overheard something which surprised and pleased her. Mrs. Raynor was talking with some one who seemed greatly interested in all that she said. Their voices were loud; indeed, one might have thought that their conversation was intended for the occupants of the piazza, and Imogene held her breath as she listened. "Yes, I'm told that Mrs. Dainty belongs to a very old and wealthy family, and that her home is as fine as Crest Villa, said one speaker; to which Mrs. Raynor replied:—

"Yes, I've heard that; but what puzzles

me is that the people here in the hotel speak of her beautiful little daughter, Dorothy, and a moment after, somebody is sure to say that Nancy is a pretty girl. Now, why do they speak of Dorothy as Mrs. Dainty's daughter? Isn't Nancy her daughter? If not, who is she, I'd like to know?"

"I believe her name is Ferris, — yes, that's it, Nancy Ferris. Somebody was saying, a few days ago, that she was a girl that Mrs. Dainty was caring for. I don't think she really considers her the same as a daughter, but she's interested in her."

"And who is that woman who is nearly always with Mrs. Dainty?" questioned Mrs. Raynor, determined to gather as much news as possible.

"Some say that she's a friend, but the girls call her Aunt Charlotte, and some

think she's a governess for Dorothy and Nancy; I will say I don't understand it."

"Well, if Mrs. Dainty thinks a governess good company, I wonder who she thinks Mrs. John Raynor is?" said Imogene's mother, tartly.

"Perhaps she doesn't think about it," the other woman replied sweetly.

Mrs. Raynor must have been very angry at the reply, but she wished to obtain more points in regard to Mrs. Dainty's family. She did not know that curiosity was vulgar, so she continued loudly to question:—

"How long has Nancy been living with Mrs. Dainty?" she asked.

"I don't know; but there's one thing which I cannot quite understand. I've told you what they say about Mrs. Dainty's interest in Nancy, and that she's

been living with Mrs. Dainty for some time, but to-day I was told that Nancy, a year ago, was a dancer, actually a *stage* dancer! Do you suppose it's true?"

Mrs. Raynor's ejaculation might have been one of surprise, or delight; one could not have told which.

"Really!" she cried, "did she say that she knew that? I shouldn't want my Imogene to play with a theatrical child."

To this very odd statement her friend, to whom Imogene was always rude, replied:—

"Well, I don't know this little Nancy, but I'll say one thing, she seems to be a refined and rather a charming girl."

"And I guess there isn't a child anywhere that's more charming than my Imogene," Mrs. Raynor declared.

Evidently her friend held a different

opinion, as she made no reply. A moment after, Imogene, where she stood listening and wondering if she should hear more, heard brisk footsteps approaching, and immediately ran out upon the piazza and down the steps. She thought that her mother was looking for her, and would be angry if she found her small daughter eavesdropping. Away she ran to tell all which she had heard. She was careful not to choose any one for a listener who was a friend to Dorothy or Nancy. Rather she sought those who were acquainted with neither, but who would gladly have been free to visit Crest Villa. To these she hastened, telling that Mrs. Dainty was choosing as a friend for Dorothy a dancing girl, a child of the theatre, preferring her society to such as they, and adding that her

mamma did not wish her, Imogene, even to speak to such a child.

Silly Imogene did not realize that Nancy might have been forced to earn her living by dancing, and yet be a sweet and innocent child, with a loving heart and gentle, kindly ways. She had listened to the gossip of her mamma and her mamma's friend, and had run to repeat all which the silly women had said. It had been just what she had wished for — something unpleasant which she could repeat.

If the girls to whom she had repeated it had been kind and true, they would never have listened to her, but they were friends of her own who were very much like Imogene — girls whose homes lacked refinement, and who, as a rule, were rude and uncouth; so with hearts filled with

envy for Dorothy's and Nancy's position and popularity, they listened to Imogene's tale.

Imogene had entertained them several times; perhaps she might again if they were careful to please her. They knew that she wished them to ignore Dorothy and Nancy, and wishing to obtain her favor, and fearing her displeasure, they at once seemed to agree with her, and spoke as if the little girls of Crest Villa should feel that their friendship was not desired.

This was the reason of the averted eyes and tip-tilted chins which so surprised Dorothy, Nancy, and Rita that sunny morning upon the beach.

CHAPTER IX

A PICNIC

RITA WARRENTON was to give a party, not an indoor party, not even a garden party, but a picnic party, and what could be more fascinating than a picnic at the shore? The delightful news travelled from one end of the beach to the other, until girls who were not at all acquainted with Rita were telling other girls of the anticipated event, and each time it was repeated in the same way.

“Rita Warrenton is to give a party,” said the little gossips. To be sure it was not Rita who was to give the party; it was her mamma who was to give it for

her, but the fact, not the way in which it was expressed, was what interested the girls. Quite naturally they thought that the party was to be given at the Warrenton's summer home, for many who talked of the event did not dream that a picnic was being planned.

Among those who listened to the chatter were many who wished that they were acquainted with Rita, and thus might expect an invitation; others who enjoyed quite enough gayety among their own friends; and a few who seemed indifferent.

No one appeared less interested than Imogene as she stood listening to the gossip regarding the party. With the toe of her shoe she pushed the sand into little heaps, while her wee sister tugged at her hand and coaxed her to go for a walk upon the beach. The little girl felt that

she was not really on the beach unless she was near the waves, but Imogene paid no heed to her teasing, and stood sullenly looking down at her shoe.

“Did *you* know about Rita Warrenton’s party, Imogene Raynor?” questioned one of the girls.

“It’s likely I do,” said Imogene. “’Fi didn’t know before, I’d know now, with you girls talking of nothing else this whole morning.”

“We might quite as pleasantly talk of the party as talk of nothing, Imogene; I’d like to know what you’ve talked of.”

“Come, Im’gene, come!” demanded the little girl as she continued to tug at Imogene’s hand. “*Come!*”

Imogene remained motionless. She did not wish to show that she felt the least interested in the party, yet she remained

near enough to the chattering group to hear all which was said regarding it.

One of the girls said that she had been told that Rita and her guests were to wear frocks of silk or satin and that many of them were to wear diamonds, to which one of the little gossips quickly responded: "Why, I don't believe that. Girls don't wear diamonds."

Imogene wondered if the statement were true. "Why should not girls wear diamonds?" she questioned. There were many things which puzzled Imogene. She could not understand why she should so often have the care of her little sister. The other small guests at the hotel were provided with maids. If her mamma could not have a maid, why should she not sometimes care for the tiny girl? Others besides Imogene asked the

question, but they asked it of each other, not of Mrs. Raynor.

She could have answered, but she would not have been pleased to. There was but one reason. She could not have a maid, and she felt that it did not look at all fine to take charge of her baby, so Imogene was compelled to. Imogene did not think it fine, but that was quite different, Mrs. Raynor thought.

She was fond of her children, but she did not like the care of them, while Imogene, who really loved little Erla, was pleased to amuse her whenever there was nothing which she preferred to do. So when the group of girls began to talk of things which did not interest her, she willingly yielded to Erla's coaxing, and turned toward the long, sunny beach.

The little girl was very happy, and

seemed not to notice that her sister was not inclined to talk. For a long time they walked near the waves, and Erla's tiny hand tightly clasped Imogene's. She skipped along the sand, sometimes pausing to pick up a shell, or to marvel at a footprint which a wave had filled; then on again, singing contentedly because her sister was with her.

Imogene was still thinking of the party. She had many friends with whom she played and whose parties she attended, but that was not enough. Here was a girl whom she did not know, and whose friends were not her friends, who was about to give a party. That she would not be invited made her very unhappy. She could not be contented with all the pleasures which she had; that there was one which she could not share was too

aggravating. Imogene was sullen. She would tell her mamma, — she was sure of sympathy, for Mrs. Raynor could always be made very angry by a fancied slight.

Rita Warrenton and her friends had not dreamed how great a commotion the anticipated party had caused. Indeed, they could not have imagined that girls who were strangers to them could be so interested. They looked forward to it with delight, for Rita was a lovely girl, and Mrs. Warrenton had planned this summer party with a view to making it quite different from any which she had previously given. It was a novelty that it should be a picnic, and when the chosen day dawned bright and sunny, all who were so fortunate as to have been invited were filled with excitement, and eagerly watched the clock for the appointed hour

to arrive. Mrs. Warrenton knew that a surprise would add to the pleasures offered her guests, and when Rita asked upon what part of the beach her party was to be enjoyed, Mrs. Warrenton laughed as she said, "That is my secret, Rita, but you and your friends may try to guess."

They did try, but could not tell if their guessing were correct, because Rita's mamma only laughed and refused to answer their queries. As no one knew where the picnic was to be, private carriages were useless, and Mrs. Warrenton urged the girls to be ready at nine, when her coachman would call for them.

Dorothy and Nancy stood in the hall at Crest Villa, wondering how long they would have to wait, when a smart ring at the bell made them fly to the door before the maid could reach it. There

stood Mrs. Warrenton's footman, and beyond him at the gate the gayest of barges awaited them, its four handsome horses tossing their heads and pawing the ground as if they were quite as eager as the children to reach their destination. Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte ran down the walk and waved their handkerchiefs as the coach rolled away, while within the barge Mrs. Warrenton and Rita gave them a cheery greeting.

"And to think," said Rita, "we haven't the least idea where mamma is to take us. It's my party, and she hasn't yet told me where it is to be."

"What fun!" said Dorothy; "we thought you knew and wished to surprise us."

"I'll be as much surprised as any one," Rita replied with a merry laugh.

They called for Fay Burnham, and next for Vera Vane, then on farther down the beach for Rita's cousins, Ethel and Grace Dean; for all of Rita's dearest friends the gay barge waited, and when it was comfortably filled, the coachman snapped his whip and the four fine horses started off at a rapid pace toward the place which Mrs. Warrenton had chosen for their picnic.

How they laughed and talked of the pleasures which they were sure to enjoy, and how they wondered and guessed as to whether they were near the place, or if they had yet far to ride! They were still guessing when Mrs. Warrenton said:—

“Here we are!” and looking out they saw that the barge had drawn up in front of a beautiful pavilion.

“Oh, how lovely! How fine! What

a beautiful place!" they cried, as they left the barge and hurried into the charming little building which had been especially designed for private parties. A tiny grove of rugged pines made a fine background for it, and their sturdy branches overhung its pagoda-like roof. Before them stretched the sea, the dancing waves glistening in the sunlight; truly Mrs. Warrenton had chosen a delightful spot.

The girls stood in groups which vied with each other in lively chatter, when from the farthest corner came the sweet tones of a violin. Quickly they turned in the direction whence the sounds as of tuning came. There were the musicians, and Rita was standing in the centre of the floor. In her hands she held a gilded hoop, from which floated bright ribbons

of every hue. Lightly she passed the bright hoop over her head, and standing within the circle she firmly held the hoop, while she invited her friends each to take a ribbon.

The girls hastened to do her bidding, declaring the new game to be far prettier than any Maypole dance. The musicians commenced to play a lively air, and holding their ribbons high in air they skipped around in a merry circle until their eyes were bright and their cheeks flushed with the exercise.

There were seats along the sides of the pavilion, and upon these they rested, while the band made sweet music to which they listened with delight.

“Do you know, Rita,” said Fay Burnham, “I heard yesterday that all the girls who were invited to your party were

to wear jewels of some sort, but that you were to wear diamonds to-day." Her eyes were twinkling as she thought of the absurd story.

"Why, who told such a tale as that? She must have been joking."

"She wasn't," said Fay; "she said she knew it was so because somebody had said it was true. She didn't say who told her, but it was Imogene Raynor who told me."

"I didn't know that you knew her," said Rita, in surprise.

"I didn't know I did," said Fay, laughing, "but she came up to me when I was on the beach, and when she had told me about the diamonds, she turned and ran away."

What would Imogene and her friends have thought if they had seen Rita and her guests dressed in pretty, dainty frocks,

it is true, but certainly not in silk or satin, nor with glittering jewellery? Flowers they wore in place of jewels, and their tasteful costumes were of muslin or lawn. They were girls whose parents preferred simple elegance to vulgar display, but neither Imogene nor her friends would have understood that. They would have thought it strange that any one should possess wealth and not at all times be gorgeously dressed.

Dorothy and Nancy joined Rita and Fay, and Fay asked them if they had heard the odd story which Imogene had told. Dorothy, always a peacemaker, thought that Fay Burnham need not have repeated Imogene's words only to laugh at them.

"Perhaps some one *did* tell her that we were going to dress like that. Imogene

couldn't know whether we were to or not."

Nancy thought it might be best to talk of something else. She had seen a frown upon Fay's pretty face.

"Imogene's little sister is very cunning," said Nancy; "have you seen her?"

"She's cunning and pretty, too," said Fay. "I saw you playing with her on the beach yesterday. What's her name?"

"Her name is Erla," Nancy answered, "and she says the funniest things. She follows me and begs me to play with her, but if Imogene sees her, she takes her by the hand and makes her go home."

"Yes, and Erla goes with her because she has to, but she cries 'Nanny, Nanny,' all the way," said Dorothy.

"How very queer!" said Fay. "What makes her act so?"

"I don't know," said Dorothy. "She said her mamma would not let her play with us."

"The idea!" said Fay.

"Well, it *is* queer," said Nancy, "for Mrs. Raynor sent Imogene over to invite Dorothy to the hotel one of the first days that we were here. She couldn't go, because Mrs. Dainty would not let her visit strangers."

Rita came hurrying toward them to tell of a new game which they were to play, and eagerly they joined the other girls. Many amusing games were played, until Mrs. Warrenton's maid came to say that a fine spread awaited them. Through the grove they followed her, laughing gayly, for not even Rita knew where the feast was laid. Up this sunny path and that, enjoying the scent of the pines, and chat-

ting merrily as they slipped on the brown pine-needles, they followed the trim maid, until an opening in the trees revealed the treat which awaited them.

In true picnic fashion the servants, under Mrs. Warrenton's direction, had placed heavy felting upon the ground, and over it was laid the damask cloth. Then, in brave array, the feast was spread, and the sandwiches, olives, cakes, and ices, the fruits and sherbets, disappeared as if by magic.

"Was there ever so delightful a picnic?" thought each of the guests. What a charming spot! Beside each plate was a lovely pearl shell heaped with bonbons, the shells to be kept as souvenirs.

How the hours had flown! When the good things had been enjoyed, and the happy party were admiring their beautiful

pearl bonbon-holders, they were surprised to learn that it was about time to be thinking of the long ride home.

Mrs. Warrenton's watch declared it to be half-past three, and the barge ride would occupy an hour. How eager they were to tell Rita how truly they had enjoyed the party, and to assure Mrs. Warrenton how great had been their pleasure!

It was a bright day in a delightful summer, and Dorothy and Nancy declared that they should always remember it. They had strolled upon the shore, had listened to charming music, had merry games in the gay little pavilion, had lunched in the shady grove, and now they were to enjoy the fine ride home. What was riding in a private carriage to rolling along over the beach as one of a merry barge load of laughing girl friends?

They clambered into the barge, after much choosing of places, and sat gayly chattering of the events of the day, while the servants repacked the hampers, and, with the baskets and packages, made ready for the return trip. Then they heard the flourish and crack of the whip, the horses tossed their manes, and they were out on the sandy stretch which led toward their summer home.

CHAPTER X

A LITTLE HEROINE

MRS. DAINTY had gone to the city to make some purchases, while Aunt Charlotte was busily sewing in an upper room at Crest Villa. Dorothy and Nancy were walking up and down the drawing-room, talking of the pleasures of the day before. A mist, through which the sun was trying to penetrate, hung over the sea, and until the sky cleared, it was much pleasanter indoors.

“Let’s sit by the window and talk,” said Dorothy; “we can choose vessels when they come in sight, and guess what their cargo may be.”

It was a favorite amusement, and Nancy was always delighted when Dorothy proposed it. Through the thick mist the horizon was scarcely visible, but nearer the shore the sun could faintly be seen emerging from the fog, so that vessels far out to sea were invisible, but as soon as they sailed out under the rift in the clouds, the sunlight touched the sails, and Dorothy declared that it seemed as if the ship had come up out of the water. Sometimes it vanished again in the mist, sometimes it kept straight on in the sunlight; these they called lucky ships, and they at once chose a cargo of all the good things which they could think of as freight for the passing craft, looking eagerly after it as it sailed away in the sunlight, and wished it a world of good luck.

They had been sitting by the window for some time, waiting for a vessel to appear, when Dorothy, pointing toward a glimmering craft, cried: "There's one! there's one!"

Nancy turned. Yes, there it was, its sails filled and shining in the sunlight. So fair it looked that Nancy said: "You saw it first, Dorothy, so you choose the cargo." Dorothy looked toward the pretty craft and seemed to be thinking.

"You choose," Nancy repeated. Dorothy nodded, to show that she heard, but she said nothing until it was out of sight. Then she turned from the window, and taking Nancy's hand, she said:—

"I chose that the vessel was filled with gold, and that as soon as it reached the wharf, I'd give it all to you."

"Oh, Dorothy, there never was a girl

so sweet," said Nancy; "just wait until the next one comes in sight. I'll call it mine, and you'll see what I'll fill it with."

Eagerly they watched for some minutes, and then a large and stately craft came out into the sunlit water.

"Mine! mine!" cried Nancy; "and it is filled with many, many diamonds, and they are all for you, Dorothy. There are necklaces, and bracelets, and rings — more than you can count. There are buckles for your shoes, and quarts and quarts of loose diamonds that you may just play with, because they are so bright and so beautiful to look at."

"Who's a dear now, Nancy? I told mamma to-day that of all the girls I know, there's not one who is so dear to me as you," said Dorothy; and as they clasped each other's hands, the blue eyes

looked into the brown eyes and spoke even more lovingly than had the impulsive words.

For a long time they sat waiting for another sail to appear, and while they watched, the fog lifted; the sun came out and set the waves sparkling; the beach was dazzling in the bright light; the day was now fine. They left the window and ran from the drawing-room down the stairway, and out upon the beach. There were few people to be seen, and none whom they knew.

They seated themselves upon the dry sand and watched the waves, now coming in, now receding. For a long time Dorothy sat looking out to sea, her blue eyes wide open, her lips parted. The gentle breeze blew her bright hair back from her flushed cheeks, and played with the broad

brim of her hat. Nancy watched her. How lovely she was! At last Nancy spoke.

“What are you thinking of?” she asked.

Slowly Dorothy turned from the sea, and she leaned toward Nancy and clasped her hand as she said:—

“I was thinking of the time when you first came to live with us, and then of the time when you were stolen from Aunt Charlotte, and were so long away in a great city, where we couldn’t find you, although mamma had so many people hunting for you; and, oh, Nancy, dear, the best of it all is that we *did* find you, and that you are to be with us always.”

“Yes, that’s the best, the very best of it,” said Nancy, “for I’m always happy with you, Dorothy.”

“And I with you,” Dorothy replied.

And now the sunshine was luring the cottagers and the guests from the hotels out upon the beach, while every steamer which arrived at the pier brought hosts of transient guests who came for a day's pleasure.

A party of children, their shoes and stockings off and their skirts held high, were wading in the shallow pools left by receding waves, then running from an approaching breaker—a laughing, screaming troop. They were of different ages, but all were very young—the smallest possibly four and the eldest six years. Dorothy and Nancy had been so amused watching them that they had not noticed two who were at play upon the sand—Imogene and Erla.

At a little distance from her children sat Mrs. Raynor with a group of friends.

She was paying little heed to the children, for she believed that Erla was quite safe with the older girl, and Imogene, surely, should be contented to amuse Erla. She was greatly interested in a choice bit of gossip which one of her friends was repeating, and eagerly listened lest one word of the news might be missed.

Imogene seemed intent upon amusing her little sister, but it was evident that her efforts were not approved by the tiny girl.

"You don't play it nice 'tall," Erla cried impatiently; "you don't play it nice 'tall," she repeated.

"You wished me to play train of cars with you, and I'm playing it," said Imogene.

"Well, you don't play it the way I want to," said Erla, petulantly; "Nancy plays it nice wiv me, an' I'm going to play it wiv

her this minute. Nanny! Nanny!" she cried, as she started to run toward where Nancy and Dorothy were sitting.

"Come here, Erla, come here! you know ma doesn't let you play with her," called Imogene, so loudly that Nancy and Dorothy plainly heard; but Erla would not listen. She had no idea of doing as Imogene said. Why should she? Imogene never thought of obeying, and Erla followed her example. Now, with her little hands outstretched, she ran toward Nancy.

"Nanny! Nanny!" she cried, "come play cars wiv me."

Nancy loved little children, and Erla was very cunning. She would gladly have played the childish game to please her, but she knew that as soon as they began to play Erla would be called away, so she said, very gently:—



Amy Brooks.

“Nanny! Nanny!” she cried, “come play cars wiv me.”

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“You’d better run back to Imogene; she’s calling you.”

“Don’t care! Don’t want to play wiv Im’gene; want to play wiv you, Nanny.”

“What will you do?” questioned Dorothy. But before Nancy could answer, Mrs. Raynor’s shrill voice made itself heard:—

“Imogene! go at once, and bring Erla back! I thought you were amusing her.”

Imogene made a sharp reply, and, running after her little sister, took her by the hand and, regardless of her crying, hurried her away from Nancy.

Nancy was grieved by Mrs. Raynor’s rudeness, and Dorothy, to turn her attention, proposed a stroll along the beach. They walked away from the crowd of pleasure-seekers, and as they turned they saw Fay Burnham hurrying toward them. As usual, she was full of excitement, and

in listening to Fay, Nancy, for the time, forgot Mrs. Raynor.

“Oh, what do you suppose? But I might as well tell you, for you couldn’t guess what I’m going to do. I’ve just been over to your house, and you weren’t there. The maid said she had seen you going toward the beach, and I ran every step of the way till I saw you.”

“But you haven’t yet told us what you came to tell,” laughed Dorothy.

“I will, though,” said Fay, “for I’ve just heard it, and I can’t keep it another minute. You know I told you that we were to stay here at the shore a few weeks longer, but I supposed that when we left here we were to return to our city home, and so we are, but instead of remaining there all winter, we are going to Europe. Think of it! To Europe, and, best of all,

no school for me for a year!" She whirled about like a top, and only stopped when nearly breathless. Dorothy and Nancy were pleased and puzzled.

"Of course you're delighted to go," said Dorothy, "but don't you like school?"

"Indeed, no," said Fay. "I think school and lessons are stupid, and to think that for a year I shall have no lessons at all is just like a fairy tale."

"And I'm so glad that soon I shall have lessons to study that I am just wild to have them begin," said Nancy.

"Yes, that's the difference," said Fay; "some like school and some just detest it. I do, for one, and for a year I won't have to hear anybody say 'school' to me."

Fay was so excited with the thought of the trip to Europe that she could think

and talk of little else, and in listening to her tale of the fine things which she was to see, repeated as Mrs. Burnham had described them, the three girls had walked much farther than they had thought.

“Why, Fay Burnham, just see where you’ve led us! We’ve been listening to you, and not noticing how far we were going,” said Dorothy. “There’s that house with the great steeple on it—the one we’ve seen from our own window; we never walked so far before.”

“This morning when I asked Aunt Charlotte how far away she thought that steeple might be, she said ‘two miles at least,’” said Nancy; “let’s go back.”

They turned, and sped along the beach, Fay still talking excitedly of her anticipated pleasure trip, and just as she had re-told the story for the fifth time,

and was wishing that there were yet other details to be recounted, she heard her name called and saw some one signalling to her.

“There’s mamma’s maid. How tiresome!” exclaimed Fay. “I suppose I’ll have to go, ’though I can’t think what she wants. Good-by,” she called, as she hastened away, “I’ll be over to-morrow.”

They had now reached that part of the beach which the bathers usually preferred, but the water was too cool to be tempting, and the waves broke upon the sand undisturbed by the gayly dressed bathers, who chose to remain upon the shore and have their costumes admired in a dry state rather than to sport in the chilly water.

Although the day was sunny, there were less people upon the shore than

usual, and it thus was easy to see if one's friends were there.

"There's Vera," said Dorothy; but Nancy, who was gathering some tiny shells, did not hear her, nor did she notice that Dorothy had, for the moment, left her. Supposing that Nancy was following, Dorothy ran to where Vera stood chatting with a group of friends and at once became interested in their conversation. One of the girls was telling of a coaching parade which she had seen while at the mountains, and so well did she describe its beauty that the little group listened spellbound.

Intent upon gathering as many as possible of the tiny shells, Nancy was selecting the prettiest and piling them in a little heap when a sharp cry caused her to spring to her feet. Who could have

uttered that frightened shriek? Why were the people standing so still? Why were their faces pale? What did it mean?

Some one pointed to a woman who stood wringing her hands and looking with wild, staring eyes toward the sea. Suddenly she turned.

“Will no one save her? My baby, my little Erla?”

The wretched woman pointed a trembling finger, and Nancy, who had hurried forward, looked and saw — saw that the mother was helpless with fright, while not one of all the crowd attempted to aid; saw little Erla’s danger, and ran like a deer from the many hands that tried to detain her.

“I’ll save her; I’ll save her!” she cried, as she sped toward Erla.

And where was Erla? A spring-board had been built for those who wished to practise diving, and now, on the end of the plank, the little girl crouched, gazing down into the green waves, and wondering if the water were deep. That she was in danger she never dreamed; and, even as they watched her, she hummed a little song. The mother watched Nancy's flying feet; would she, could she, save the baby girl? Would Erla stay in her present position, or, seeing Nancy, would some quick movement send her down into those restless waves? And if she remained where she now lay, how could Nancy —

Mrs. Raynor stood motionless, as indeed did all who watched and waited.

No one thought of assisting, and truly no one dreamed what Nancy thought of doing. But Nancy knew. On, on she

ran, until at last she stood by the spring-board. She knew that she must not frighten the little girl, or do anything which would cause her to turn quickly about. She knew of but one thing to do, and she was determined to do it.

“Wait for me, Erla,” she cried; “I’m coming out to play ‘train of cars’ with you. Wait just where you are or I’ll not come.”

“Oh, Nanny, I’ll wait, for I love you,” the little voice responded.

“Don’t move!” cautioned Nancy.

“I won’t stir,” said Erla; and Nancy commenced to creep cautiously out on the plank.

Breathlessly they watched her. What did she intend to do; how would she return with the little one? Nancy was slender; she could not carry chubby little

Erla and walk the plank in safety! Thus they reasoned, but no one offered aid.

Dorothy with Vera and her friends were at a little distance from the crowd which watched the two children. They had not heard Nancy's words, nor seen her running down the beach until she had nearly reached the spring-board. Dorothy's cheeks were pale and her eyes filled with terror. She clasped Vera's hands and neither spoke, for each knew the other's thoughts, and what could either say to reassure?

Erla waited as she had promised; was not Nancy coming to play her favorite game with her? Slowly, carefully, Nancy made her way along the plank. How long it seemed to those upon the shore!

Nearer toward Erla Nancy drew, and,

—yes, she was turning around as if to return. They saw her turn her head as if telling the little girl what to do; the child laughed as if delighted. A faint sound of her merriment reached the mother. Oh, the music of that little voice! Would she soon have Erla in her arms, or would both children be — The possibility was too horrible to be thought of.

Out on the spring-board Nancy crouched. She had turned about, and to Erla she said:—

“We’ll play train of cars, Erla, if you’ll be very careful. You always like to play that.”

“Will mamma let me?” questioned the little girl.

Nancy’s cheek flushed. “She’ll let you play it *this* time,” she said. “Now take hold of my skirts,” she continued,

"and I'll be the engine and you the first car."

Erla agreed. "Go slowly," she cautioned; Nancy had not thus amused her for a long time. Along the board they crept, and when at half its length, the waiting crowd saw them pause, and saw Nancy turn as if urging Erla to follow.

Erla was backing. What caprice was moving her to make their danger greater?

Nancy felt the backward movement, the tugging at her skirts.

"Oh, come, Erla, come!" she urged; "you mustn't pull me back! Come!"

"Dis train is backing!" declared Erla.

"No, no, it *isn't*!" cried Nancy, sharply, her fear for their safety making her voice quiver.

"Yes, 'tis! *Feel* it back!" insisted the child, continuing to pull at Nancy's skirts.

“ Erla, come this minute ! ” cried Nancy, desperately ; “ if you don’t come this very minute, we’ll be run over ! ”

“ Oh, then I’ll come,” said Erla, much impressed ; “ we’ll play back the cars some other time.”

“ Yes, some other time,” sighed Nancy, in quick relief ; and again they crept slowly on, until, O happy moment, the two reached the sand, and with Erla’s hand in hers, Nancy ran to Mrs. Raynor, to whom Imogene was now clinging.

“ I said I’d save her, and I did,” said Nancy, and she turned to hurry away ; but Mrs. Raynor clasped her hands, while others clustered about her.

“ Oh, Nancy, how can I thank you ? ” said Mrs. Raynor, her eyes filled with tears.

“ You needn’t try to,” said Nancy, sim-

ply. "She's a dear little girl, and I wanted to save her."

"Nancy, forgive me," Mrs. Raynor said.

"And me," said Imogene. "I guess we'll love you now, if you will let us."

Nancy insisted that she had done nothing deserving of great praise; but she could not check the crowd's enthusiasm.

"She saved little Erla!"

"She's the bravest girl in the world!"

"Three cheers for Nancy Ferris!"

Such were the cries which greeted Mrs. Dainty's ears as she rode down the beach toward her villa.

She saw Nancy with Dorothy's arms about her, and wondered of what the excited crowd were talking. She bade the coachman stop, and Nancy, upon seeing Mrs. Dainty, hurried away from the crowd, and, with Dorothy, entered the carriage.

CHAPTER XI

HOMeward

TO the friends who gathered round Mrs. Raynor and her children, it seemed only reasonable that in her gratefulness toward Nancy for Erla's safe return, she should, at heart, be sorry for the many unkind things which she had said. They were, however, surprised to hear her speak so humbly.

"I've been very mean and narrow to speak of any one as I have spoken of Nancy," she said. "I've asked her to forgive my unkindness. She has shown herself, child though she is, to be nobler than I, a woman grown, have ever been.

What does it matter that her nimble feet have danced before the dazzling foot-lights to entertain thousands? She is the most forgiving and lovable child that I ever knew, and has a braver heart than any of this great throng that saw Erla's danger. Not a man offered aid; it was Nancy Ferris who ventured out and saved her."

Again the cheers rang out upon the summer air, and long after Mrs. Raynor, with Imogene and Erla, had returned to the hotel, the people, in little groups, stood talking of Mrs. Raynor's penitence and Nancy's bravery.

In the carriage Mrs. Dainty questioned Nancy as to the cause of such great excitement, but before Nancy could reply, Dorothy hastened to explain.

"Nancy will not half tell you, mamma,"

she said ; “ she insists that she has done nothing wonderful, but oh, I never would have dared to do what Nancy did ; ” and then followed an exciting description of Nancy’s heroism. Mrs. Dainty clasped Nancy’s hand firmly, while she thought of the peril of both Nancy and Erla.

“ But indeed I didn’t expect to be drowned,” said Nancy ; “ I knew all the time that I could coax Erla to follow me. It wasn’t such a great thing to do ; they ought not to have cheered so.”

“ But Nancy, dear, Erla almost surely would have been drowned,” said Dorothy.

“ But she *wasn’t*,” declared Nancy ; and that was the most that she would say. Aunt Charlotte was very proud of Nancy, but she trembled when she thought of her danger, and clasped her in her arms as she tenderly said : —

“ My Nancy, my dear, brave Nancy.”

“ Aunt Charlotte, I *had* to do it,” said Nancy ; “ I stood near Mrs. Raynor, and she was so frightened that she could do nothing. Nobody else offered, and, of course, I couldn’t see Erla out there on the end of the spring-board and not run to save her.”

Aunt Charlotte looked into the truthful dark eyes, and knew how impossible it was for Nancy to withhold aid if in any way she could give it ; but she also thought of the men who idly lounged upon the shore and left the task for a little girl to do.

It was marvellous, the change that Nancy’s brave act had worked ! Dorothy had always loved her dearly, but it now seemed as if she daily searched for opportunities to assure Nancy how true, how sincere was her affection.

Vera, excitable, changeful Vera, declared that Nancy was ever so much more interesting than any of the heroines of whom she had learned in her history, and she fairly overwhelmed her with praise and attention, while Fay Burnham vied with Vera in her admiration of Nancy.

Of all the girls, not one was more sincere than Imogene. Meeting Nancy on the beach as she walked along with Dorothy, she extended her hand, saying:—

“I’d like to tell you something, but I don’t know that you care to hear it; I shouldn’t think you would. I’ve been so disagreeable, but I *must* tell you. You saved my little sister, Erla, and I shall remember it as long as I live. I was careless, and had forgotten to watch her; she wouldn’t have been out on that spring-board if I had been taking care of

her, and when I saw her there, I couldn't think what to do. It was you, Nancy, who did it, and I'm sorry I haven't always been nice and kind. 'Twas I that talked to the other girls and made them disagreeable toward you, but I've been talking to them this morning, and they think as I do, that you are the bravest girl they ever knew. I wish you'd say that you will forgive me, Nancy."

It was a long speech for Imogene to make, but she had said that she would do all that was in her power to undo the mischief, and truly it required courage for a girl like Imogene to speak so humbly.

Nancy took her proffered hand.

"I'll say I'll forgive you, and I will," she said gently, and Imogene looked relieved. She had wondered how Nancy would receive her; if she would listen to

what she had to say, and, having listened, if her answer would be kind. She had found it easy to turn the girls toward Nancy. They had been on the beach, had seen Erla's danger and Nancy's brave deed, and they had admired her. Thus it was that when next Dorothy and Nancy walked along the shore, there were smiling faces instead of scornful, averted glances, and Dorothy was happy, — Nancy was now understood, every one knew how truly lovable she was.

Loved and admired from the day of her birth, Dorothy Dainty was all that was sweet and generous. It was not enough that her friends should truly love her, they must love Nancy, too.

It was strange that both were charmed with Vera Vane. Both were steadfast and sincere, while Vera was rightly

named the "weather-vane." Not that she was not true to her friends; those whom she cared for were very dear to her, but she was so changeful, so full of moods and caprices, that one never knew what would please her, or what her fancy would lead her to do; but she was bright, cheerful, and full of fun, and she usually so charmed those about her, that they forgave her fickleness and deemed her a delightful companion.

It was now but a few days before Mrs. Dainty would leave Crest Villa and return to the great stone house. Already she was talking with Aunt Charlotte of plans for the late summer days. Mr. Dainty had written that he should return from abroad a month earlier than he had thought possible when he went away, and his coming was eagerly anticipated.

Dorothy caught the excitement, and with Nancy talked of the fine times which they would have when once more at home, until Vera, who had come over to lunch with them, looked up in surprise.

“Why, you are just like me, you and Nancy,” she said. “You are always laughing because I like so often to have a change, and now here you are, having a lovely time at Crest Villa, and just wild to go home. I told mamma yesterday that I was getting tired of staying at The Weather-vane, and would be glad to go back to the city. She laughed and said that when I was once more in the city, I should be thinking that the shore was a delightful place.”

“Oh, we aren’t the least bit tired of the shore,” said Dorothy; “but we can’t help thinking of the fine times which

we are to have when we reach home. Papa is to return from abroad, and he has some beautiful things which he is bringing to mamma and Aunt Charlotte, to Nancy and to me. He doesn't say what they are; he just tells us that we are to have some charming gifts, and we are trying to guess what they may be. It has been delightful here, and we shall think what a pleasant summer it has been, but we shall be so happy at home with dear papa."

"I guess I'm a queer sort of girl," said Vera, "for I don't like to have things to anticipate. If I know I'm to have something, and I don't get it at once, I'm tired of it before it arrives."

"Why, Vera Vane!" said Nancy, in surprise, "how *could* you be tired of a thing before you'd had it?"

“Oh, I could,” declared Vera, positively; “tired of *thinking* about it, don’t you know?”

Neither Dorothy nor Nancy could understand. To them, anticipation was delightful, and they could not believe it possible for any one to tire of a promised gift before she had received it.

“You’ll laugh, I know, if I tell you something, but I don’t care if you do, for it is true, and it’s funny, too,” said Vera. “It’s just this: I’ve often been going somewhere when, if the train was slow, I’ve been so tired of the whole thing that I wished that we’d not started at all. Yes,” she continued, “to enjoy doing anything I have to do it quickly, and not talk about it much before I do it.”

Dorothy knew that Vera was to be invited to visit at the stone house, and

she had thought it would be delightful to tell her, but she remained silent. Had not Vera just said that to know of a pleasure beforehand robbed it of all joy? She wished Vera to come, and to enjoy her visit; she would tell mamma to send the invitation just before the date fixed.

The few remaining days at Crest Villa sped swiftly, and when upon the deck of the steamer Dorothy and Nancy watched the receding shore, it was with joy and regret, with smiles and a few tears, that they saw it become a line, then less than a line, between sky and ocean.

They were glad to be returning to the beautiful house and its great garden, but they could not forget how happy had been the summer months by the sea.

CHAPTER XII

SEPTEMBER DAYS

WAS it the contrast between shore and country which made the garden so fair to look upon?

Did the lawn look more vividly green and the flowers more brilliant because, for weeks, they had seen the long stretch of yellow sand? They could not quite tell; but certain it was that, as they drove up the avenue, each member of the party thought that the place had never looked so beautiful.

“Oh, Dorothy, your house looks like the great stone castles that we read of in the fairy-tales,” said Nancy; “you could almost

look to see if there were a moat and a drawbridge."

"I wish there were," Dorothy replied; but Mrs. Dainty could not be induced to think that a drawbridge to be let down whenever friends arrived would add to the beauty of her home. She thought the house sufficiently picturesque as it was, and Aunt Charlotte was of the same opinion.

"If there were a drawbridge," said Nancy, "no tramps could enter;" and Aunt Charlotte knew of what she was thinking. Ever since the day when she had been stolen, Nancy had been afraid of any rough-looking man who had passed the house; and John, who was very fond of Nancy, had been cautioned to see that no stranger loitered about the place.

And now the great door was opened wide, and the maid, Norah, with smiling



She drew Nancy toward a pedestal, from behind which they peeped. — *Page 195.*

face, stood waiting to take the wraps, bags, and suit cases. She had missed "her family," she said; and, indeed, all the servants were glad to see their lovely mistress and dear Dorothy, while they held gentle Aunt Charlotte in kind regard, and declared that Nancy was the life of the party.

The news that Dorothy had returned flew through the neighborhood; Molly Merton, having been the first to hear it, ran in haste to greet her, closely followed by Flossie, who was eager to know if the good news were true.

Dorothy heard their voices as they ran along the avenue, and she drew Nancy toward a pedestal, from behind which they peeped, waiting to surprise their playmates as soon as they should arrive.

"I don't see them anywhere, but I'm *sure* they've come; the other girls said so," said Molly.

"And so we have," cried Dorothy, as with Nancy she ran from their hiding-place to greet them.

"Molly said you'd come," said Flossie; "we've had company all summer, and had lots of good times, but we've missed you, Dorothy, and you, too, Nancy."

"And we missed *you*," said Dorothy; "we did so wish you were with us at the shore."

"What fun it would have been," said Molly; "but ever so many things happened while you were away. Patricia Lavine came here one day; you know she said she had moved to New York. Well, she came up the avenue, and she rang our bell, and said she'd come to call.

She looked just as funny as ever. She had on a hat just loaded with flowers, and her fingers were covered with rings. She had ever so many bracelets on her wrists, and in her hand she carried a large fan. She waved it back and forth, and said that she wouldn't have minded the heat if there hadn't been so much 'humility' in the air.

"Flossie's Uncle Harry was talking to mamma, and when Patricia said that, he didn't laugh, although he looked as if he were going to, and he turned toward the window, saying that too much 'humility' always choked him. He *did* cough, but I still think he was laughing. Patricia was a *sight* with all those things on. She didn't stay long; she said that she and her mamma came to make a few calls, and were going right back to the city. As she passed out into the hall she said:—

“ ‘Come and see me if you’re ever in N’York,’ but she didn’t tell me what street she lived on.”

“And Katy Dean’s big brother Jack is home now, and he’s brought a big dog, and a boy he calls his chum, and he’s so big he can’t sleep in the kennel,” said Flossie.

“The *dog* can’t,” corrected Molly; “you spoke as if Jack’s friend couldn’t sleep in the kennel.”

Flossie laughed at her own odd speech. “Of course I meant the dog,” she said; “*anybody’d* know that they wouldn’t ask Jack’s friend to *try* to sleep in the kennel.”

“And Nina and Jeanette Earl have been to the mountains,” said Molly, “and they brought us some tiny birch-bark canoes filled with little plants.”

“And we’ve brought you some lovely

shells," said Nancy, "so you'll know that we thought of you while we were away."

"Why, how dear you were to gather shells for us; we'll keep them always," said Molly; and Dorothy hastened to unpack the sea treasures, which were duly admired.

"The shells are beautiful," said Flossie, "just beautiful, and so many different kinds. Oh, we must make something pretty with them!"

"Indeed we must," agreed Molly. "We might make, — oh, before I forget it, there is another piece of news to tell you. You know the Jimmy boy, Nancy?" she asked, and Nancy's eager eyes showed her deep interest.

"Well, the boys say he's gone to the city to be a rich man, a *very* rich man;

Katy Dean says so. She said her brother Jack said he knew it was so, because a boy he knew said so, and the boy who said it knows another boy that's one of Jimmy's neighbors. O dear, I don't know whether I've told that just straight or not, but anyway, the greatest thing about it all is that Jimmy's *surely* going to be rich."

"Why is he *sure*?" Nancy asked, puzzled yet eager to have the delightful news verified.

"I don't know *why* he is sure; I only know he is, because all the boys knew about it, and they say it's so," said Molly; and then they talked of other things; but in Nancy's mind the thought of Jimmy's prospective wealth made a warm glow that chased away all unhappy thoughts of Jimmy's tramp to the city. She knew

now that he had persisted in his determination to run away, but he was where his mother could no longer threaten to switch him and, O joyful thought, he, the boy who had been so poor, was to be rich.

She was glad to have heard this pleasant bit of news; she would tell Aunt Charlotte about it. How surprised she would be, for she had not believed that Jimmy was in earnest, and how delighted she would be that his flight to the great city had turned out so fortunately!

Indeed, Nancy was so happy over Jimmy's good fortune that she could hardly keep her mind upon what her friends were saying, and when they turned toward home, she said:—

“We'll be over soon to see you; good-by. Oh, Dorothy, *did* you hear what they said?”

Dorothy turned in surprise.

"Why, Nancy, what do you mean? What did they say?" she asked.

"About Jimmy," Nancy said, as if Molly and Flossie had talked of nothing else.

"Oh, I know," Dorothy said, "they said that he was to be rich, but I don't see how they know."

"But they *do* know," Nancy insisted, "for it isn't one boy who said so, it was ever so many boys that said it, and it seems as if they couldn't all be mistaken."

Dorothy considered this a very wise argument, and it was a delightful thing to believe.

A few days after their return, Dorothy sat by the window which looked out upon the driveway. Nancy sat beside her, a book of fairy-tales upon her lap. She

was reading aloud a charming story, and had just reached the most exciting point, when Dorothy sprang from the cushioned window-seat and hurried toward the hall, crying joyously : —

“He has come! Papa has come! Oh, Nancy, come and meet him! Oh, where is mamma?”

She ran to open the door, Nancy shyly following. James was taking the suit case and bag from a tall, handsome man who was alighting from the carriage. He had the bright hair and the dark blue eyes which made Dorothy so fair.

“Papa, dear papa,” she cried; and Rudolph Dainty thought that he had never heard sweeter music than that little eager cry.

“Dorothy, little daughter,” he tenderly said, as he clasped her in his arms; then

noticing the shy, dark-eyed little girl who waited for a greeting, he turned and warmly grasped her slender hands as he said : —

“Nancy, little friend, for I’m sure you *are* Nancy, I am truly glad to see you.” His tender heart could not let the child for a moment feel that because she was not his daughter, she had no share in his home-coming.

“Dorothy loves you, and I’ll care for you too, because you are Dorothy’s father,” Nancy said, hardly above a whisper, surprised out of her diffidence by his warm greeting.

“You are a true little friend of the family, as Mrs. Dainty has said,” Mr. Dainty replied.

He entered the hall, escorted by Dorothy and Nancy, when Mrs. Dainty, who

had heard Dorothy's excited voice without understanding what she had said, came down the stairway. She saw the tall figure in the dim light, then she heard the well-known voice.

It seemed to Nancy that she flew over the last few stairs, and in her soft draperies floated across the hall. At all events, her light footstep was scarcely heard, and as he clasped her slender figure in his strong arms, she heard him murmur : —

“Dearest, after so many months.”

A bright light shone in Nancy's dark eyes. This was the way that gentle, kindly people cared for each other. How tenderly, and with what infinite care the members of the family endeavored to make each other happy. The warmth of their love seemed like sunlight to the

little girl who, in her own home, had known neither kindness nor affection.

Instinctively she knew that the two reunited ones would probably have much to talk of, and softly she opened the drawing-room door and entered. On the low window-seat she sat looking out into the garden, but hardly noticing the flowers blowing in the breeze, or the gardener at work. She was thinking. She had learned to know how tender was the love which bound Dorothy and her mamma so fondly ; she had been made happy by the assurance that she shared their love, that Aunt Charlotte truly cared for her. Now Mr. Dainty had returned ; she had wondered what he would be like. How handsome he was ! How tenderly he had greeted Dorothy, and in his happiness he had not forgotten her who was once the

little outcast, now his little daughter's friend. He had taken her trembling hands in his, and had said that he was *glad* to see her. He had called her *little friend!*

Dorothy had missed her, and thinking that she might be in her favorite corner of the drawing-room, ran in, and was surprised to see how thoughtful was Nancy's usually merry face.

"In here alone?" said Dorothy. "What were you thinking of when I ran in?"

"I was thinking how brave and handsome your papa is," said Nancy; "he looks just as I think a real, truly prince ought to look."

"Why, Nancy Ferris! I'm going to tell him this very minute," said Dorothy, who considered that her papa's fine appearance could not be overestimated.

"Don't you do it, Dorothy," cried Nancy, hurrying after her; "you don't know what he might think."

"Yes I *do*," Dorothy replied, "because already he likes you. He just said to mamma, 'I like your little Nancy, she has a gentle manner.' Of course he'd like to know that you think he's like a prince."

It had been a delightful surprise that Mr. Dainty should have returned a week earlier than he had thought possible when he had posted the letter which told the day on which he expected to arrive. From her window, early one morning, Nancy overheard the cook and gardener in earnest conversation.

"Sure an' Mrs. Dainty is as happy as the day is long, agoin' about the place with a wee tune on her lips," said the cook.

“An’ no wondher,” the gardener replied, “along o’ Mr. Dainty comin’ home with gifts for every one, from Miss Dorothy down to the loikes av you ’n’ me. Did I show ye the carved poipe he brung me?”

“Ye did that same, an’ I matched it wid the foine ambrill that he gave me. Sure I’m that proud ter go ter church wid it that I’ll take it, rain or shine.”

Nancy turned from the window to her dressing-case. There in its box lay a little coral necklace, his present to her. How the sensitive child wondered if her words of thanks had been sufficiently fervent to tell him how grateful she was. The coral was beautiful, but the fact that he had cared to give it to her was priceless.

A gold chain and locket had been his gift to Dorothy, and a fan of costly lace

mounted upon a mother-of-pearl frame had delighted Mrs. Dainty. Aunt Charlotte had received a work-box made of beautiful wood cunningly inlaid. Each of the servants had been remembered with a suitable gift. Happiness reigned supreme. The gay summer at the shore had been novel and charming, the home-coming delightful, and now the sunny September days were filled with gladness. The garden was gay with early autumn flowers, and from the window Nancy watched the butterflies which fluttered over the blossoms as gayly as they had flitted in the early summer time.

With Aunt Charlotte she had been staying at Mrs. Dainty's home since their return from the shore, instead of going to the stone cottage which was really Aunt Charlotte's home. The cottage gar-

den joined the grounds of the stone house, so that Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte Grayson were near neighbors; but while awaiting her husband's return, Mrs. Dainty had wished her friend to be with her, and Dorothy always liked any excuse which might keep Nancy near her.

Humming contentedly, Nancy watched the butterflies at play in the sunshine, until the murmur of voices told her that others than the butterflies were enjoying the garden. Yes, there they were, coming down the broad driveway. Mrs. Dainty, in a soft, clinging gown, a lace scarf lying lightly upon her hair and about her shoulders, walked beside Mr. Dainty, while Dorothy skipped along beside them, evidently delighted with some new plan which was being discussed. They passed beneath the window.

“Yes, a winter in the city will be a pleasant change for you,” Mr. Dainty was saying; to which Mrs. Dainty eagerly responded: —

“Indeed, it will; and to think that we shall so soon be settled in our new home!”

Dorothy made a merry rejoinder, but Nancy did not hear what she said; and soon the shrubbery hid the happy trio.

They were going to spend the winter in the city! A new home in the city! They were happy in their planning for a delightful winter, and Dorothy was as glad as they. That grieved Nancy, for if they were to live in the city, they would be far away from the stone cottage, where, through the long winter, she would live with Aunt Charlotte. But she would miss Dorothy; how could it be that Dorothy would not miss her? She had seemed

wildly excited at the prospect of a gay winter, and had, for the moment, forgotten Nancy, so Nancy thought. But she was mistaken; she did not dream that she was included in the anticipated pleasures. She turned from the window; the sunlight seemed less bright than when she had paused to watch the butterflies. Brave little girl that she was, Nancy determined to hide her regret from Dorothy.

“Dorothy is happy,” she whispered, “and I will not tell her I’m not, for that would spoil her pleasure. I’ll tell her I’m glad she’s to have a gay winter;” and with these unselfish words upon her lips, she went out into the hall, intending to go downstairs. Halfway down she paused and looked over the balustrade.

“Oh, what joy it is to sing
From the autumn until spring,”

sang Dorothy. She looked up, and, seeing Nancy, she ran toward her, saying:—

“Oh, here you are! I was just coming to find you; I’ve such news to tell!”

Nancy tried to swallow something which made her throat ache, and Dorothy continued, eagerly:—

“Such fun we’re to have! Papa has taken a house in the city, and very soon we’re to go there to stay until spring; and the house is on a great avenue, and mamma says we shall be near Vera, and aren’t you glad? Think of the winter in the city, Nancy!”

“I’m glad for *you*,” Nancy said slowly, as if it were hard to say; “but, of course, I shall miss you.”

“Why, Nancy Ferris! You won’t miss me, because you and Aunt Charlotte will be with us.”

The bright color rushed to Nancy's cheeks, and her eyes sparkled.

"I might have known that they would not leave us here," she thought gratefully.

"We're to have our lessons just the same as if we went to school. Aunt Charlotte will teach us, and we'll have a session every morning; but the afternoon will be for all sorts of fine things. Mamma says there will be flower shows and concerts and matinées for fine days, and we'll have nice times at home on stormy days, just as we do here. Isn't it fine, Nancy? Oh, *isn't* it just fine?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Dorothy," Nancy eagerly said. "It's just delightful; and I shall be with you!"

It mattered less to Nancy *where* they were going than that she would be with Dorothy. How they talked and planned,

and anticipated the pleasures in store for them!

Of the gay winter days at Dorothy's city home, of what happened to Nancy, of what became of the Jimmy boy, one may read in

“Dorothy Dainty in the City.”

